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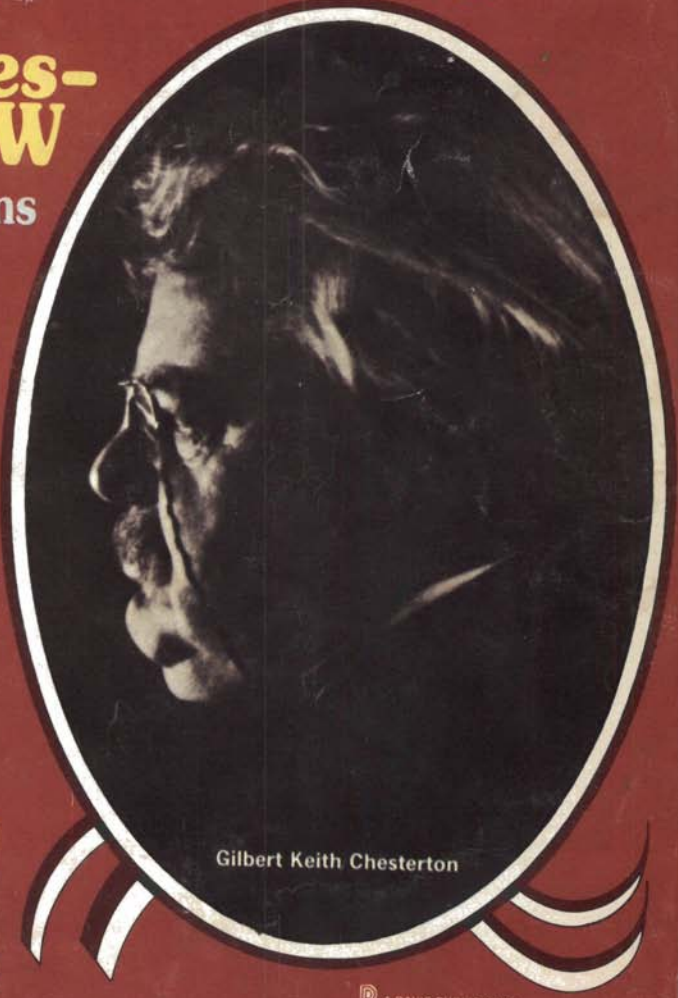

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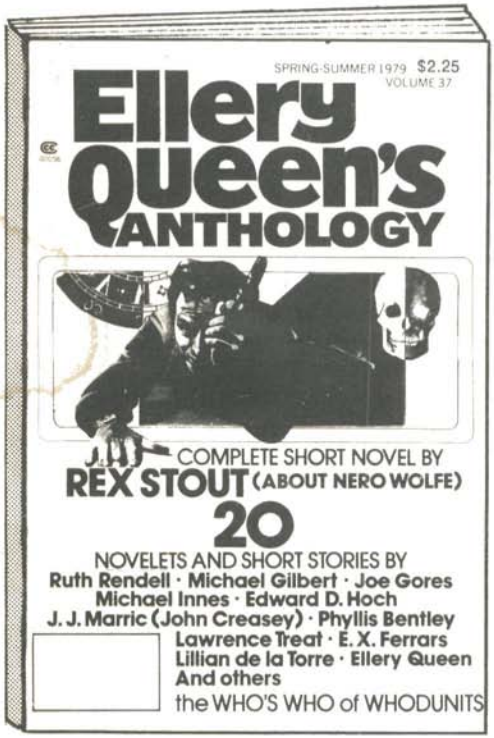
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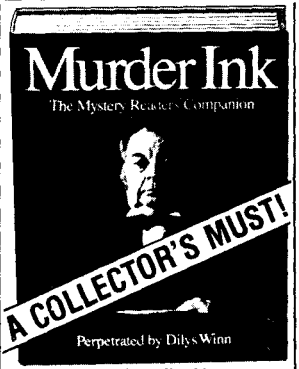

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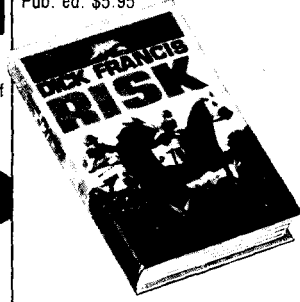

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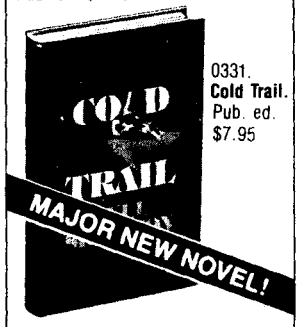

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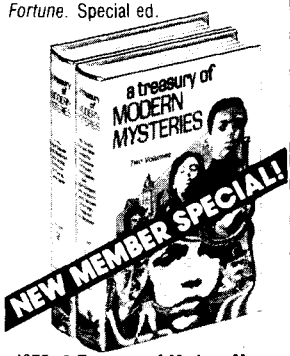

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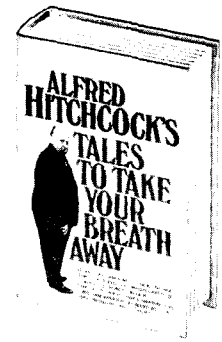

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No getting around it, Bertie Mays was a snoop. He was always peeking in or out of windows, especially to see what was going on next door. In a nutshell, "Bertie's bump of curiosity was even stronger than his sense of propriety." Now, that kind of nosiness can lead to—well, complications . . . A crime story in the best tradition of contemporary English crime writing . . .

FLOWERS THAT BLOOM IN THE SPRING

by *JULIAN SYMONS*

The outsider, Bertie Mays was fond of saying, sees most of the game. In the affair of the Purchases and the visiting cousin from South Africa he saw quite literally all of it. And the end was enigmatic and a little frightening, at least as seen through Bertie's eyes. It left him with the question whether there had been a game at all.

Bertie had retired early from his unimportant and uninteresting job in the Ministry of Welfare. He had a private income, he was unmarried, and his only extravagance was a passion for travel, so why go on working? Bertie gave up his London flat and settled down in the cottage in the Sussex countryside which he had bought years earlier as a weekend place. It was quite big enough for a bachelor, and Mrs. Last from the village came in two days a week to clean the place. Bertie himself was an excellent cook.

It was a fine day in June when he called next door to offer Sylvia Purchase a lift to the tea party at the Hall. She was certain to have been asked, and he knew she would need a lift because he had seen her husband Jimmy putting a case into the trunk of their ancient Morris. Jimmy was some sort of freelance journalist, and often went

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on trips, leaving Sylvia on her own. Bertie, who was flirtatious by nature, had asked if she would like him to keep her company, but she did not seem responsive to the suggestion.

Linton House, which the Purchases had rented furnished a few months earlier, was a rambling old place with oak beams and low ceilings. There was an attractive garden, some of which lay between the house and Bertie's cottage, and by jumping over the fence between them Bertie could walk across this garden. He did so that afternoon, taking a quick peek into the sitting room as he went by. He could never resist such peeks, because he always longed to know what people might be doing when they thought nobody was watching. On this occasion the sitting room was empty. He found Sylvia in the kitchen, washing dishes in a half-hearted way.

"Sylvia, you're not ready." She had on a dirty old cardigan with the buttons done up wrong. Bertie himself was, as always, dressed very suitably for the occasion in a double-breasted blue blazer with brass buttons, fawn trousers, and a neat bow tie. He always wore bow ties, which he felt gave him a touch of distinction.

"Ready for what?"

"Has the Lady of the Manor not asked you to tea?" That was his name for Lady Hussey up at the Hall.

She clapped a hand to her forehead, leaving a slight smudge. "I forgot all about it! Don't think I'll go, can't stand those bun fights."

"But I have called specially to collect you. Let me be your chauffeur. Your carriage awaits." Bertie made a sketch of a bow, and Sylvia laughed. She was a blonde in her early thirties, attractive in a slapdash sort of way.

"Bertie, you are a fool. All right, give me five minutes."

The women may call Bertie Mays a fool, Bertie thought, but how they adore him.

"Oh," Sylvia said. She was looking behind Bertie, and when he turned he saw a man standing in the shadow of the door. At first glance he thought it was Jimmy, for the man was large and square like Jimmy and had the same gingery fair coloring. But the resemblance went no further, for as the man stepped forward he saw that their features were not similar.

"This is my cousin, Alfred Wallington. He's paying us a visit from South Africa. Our next door neighbor, Bertie Mays."

"Pleased to meet you." Bertie's hand was firmly gripped. The two men went into the sitting room, and Bertie asked whether this was Mr. Wallington's first visit.

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"By no means. I know England pretty well. The south, anyway."

"Ah, business doesn't take you up north?" Bertie thought of himself as a tactful but expert interrogator, and the question should have brought a response telling him Mr. Wallington's occupation. In fact, however, the other man merely said that was so.

"In the course of my work I used to correspond with several firms in Cape Town," Bertie said untruthfully. Wallington did not comment. "Is your home near there?"

"No."

The negative was so firm that it gave no room for further conversational maneuver. Bertie felt slightly cheated. If the man did not want to say where he lived in South Africa, of course he was free to say nothing, but there was a certain finesse to be observed in such matters, and a crude "no" was not at all the thing. He was able to establish at least that this was the first time Wallington had visited Linton House.

On the way up to the Hall he said to Sylvia that her cousin seemed a dour fellow.

"Alf?" Bertie winced at the abbreviation. "He's all right when you get to know him."

"He said he was often in the south. What's his particular sphere of interest?"

"I don't know. I believe he's got some sort of export business around Durban. By the way, Bertie, how did you know Jimmy was away?"

"I saw him waving goodbye to you." It would hardly do to say that he had been peeping through the curtains.

"Did you now? I was in bed when he went. You're a bit of a fibber, I'm afraid, Bertie."

"Oh, I can't remember *how* I knew." Really, it was too much to be taken up on every little point.

When they drove into the great courtyard and Sylvia got out of the car, however, he reflected that she looked very slenderly elegant, and that he was pleased to be with her. Bertie liked pretty women and they were safe with him, although he would not have thought of it that way. He might have said, rather, that he would never have compromised a lady, with the implication that all sorts of things might be said and done providing they stayed within the limits of discretion.

It occurred to him that Sylvia was hardly staying within those limits when she allowed herself to be alone at Linton House with

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her South African cousin. Call me old-fashioned, Bertie said to himself, but I don't like it.

The Hall was a Nineteenth Century manor house and by no means, as Bertie had often said, an architectural gem, but the lawns at the back where tea was served were undoubtedly fine. Sir Reginald Hussey was a building contractor who had been knighted for some dubious service to the export drive. He was in demand for opening fêtes and fund-raising enterprises, and the Husseys entertained a selection of local people to parties of one kind or another half a dozen times a year. The parties were always done in style, and this afternoon there were maids in white caps and aprons, and a kind of majordomo who wore a frock coat and white gloves. Sir Reginald was not in evidence, but Lady Hussey presided in a regal manner.

Of course Bertie knew that it was all ridiculously vulgar and ostentatious, but still he enjoyed himself. He kissed Lady Hussey's hand and said that the scene was quite entrancing, like a Victorian period picture, and he had an interesting chat with Lucy Broadhinton, who was the widow of an Admiral. Lucy was the president and Bertie the secretary of the local historical society, and they were great friends. She told him now in the strictest secrecy about the outrageous affair Mrs. Monro was having with somebody who must be nameless, although from the details given, Bertie was quite able to guess his identity. There were other titbits too, like the story of the scandalous misuse of the Church Fund restoration money. It was an enjoyable afternoon, and he fairly chortled about it on the way home.

"They're such snobby affairs," Sylvia said. "I don't know why I went."

"You seemed to be having a good time. I was quite jealous."

Sylvia had been at the center of a very animated circle of three or four young men. Her laughter at their jokes had positively rung out across the lawns, and Bertie had seen Lady Hussey give more than one disapproving glance in the direction of the little group. There was something undeniably attractive about Sylvia's gaiety and about the way in which she threw back her head when laughing, but her activities had a recklessness about them which was not proper for a lady.

Bertie tried to convey something of this as he drove back, but was not sure she understood what he meant. He also broached delicately the impropriety of her being alone in the house with her cousin by asking when Jimmy would be coming back. In a day or two, she

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said casually. He refused her invitation to come in for a drink. He had no particular wish to see Alf Wallington again.

On the following night at about midnight, when Bertie was in bed reading, he heard a car draw up next door. Doors were closed and there was the sound of voices. Just to confirm that Jimmy was back, Bertie got out of bed and lifted an edge of the curtain. A man and a woman were coming out of the garage. The woman was Sylvia. The man had his arm round her, and as Bertie watched, the man bent down and kissed her neck. Then they moved toward the front door, and the man laughed and said something. From his general build he might, seen in the dim light, have been Jimmy, but the voice had the distinctive South African accent of Wallington.

Bertie drew away from the window as though he had been scalded.

It was a feeling of moral responsibility that took him round to Linton House on the following day. To his surprise Jimmy Purchase opened the door.

"I—ah—thought you were away."

"Got back last night. What can I do for you?"

Bertie said he would like to borrow the electric hedge clippers, which he knew were in the garden shed. Jimmy led the way there and handed them over. Bertie said he had heard the car coming back at about midnight.

"Yeah." Jimmy had a deplorably Cockney voice, not at all out of the top drawer. "That was Sylvia and Alf. He took her to a dance over at Ladersham. I was too fagged out, just wanted to get my head down."

"Her cousin from South Africa?"

"Yeah, right, from the Cape. He's staying here for a bit. Plenty of room."

Was he from the Cape or from Durban? Bertie did not fail to notice the discrepancy.

Bertie's bump of curiosity was even stronger than his sense of propriety. It became important, even vital, that he should know just what was going on next door. When he returned the hedge cutters he asked them all to dinner, together with Lucy Broadhinton to make up the number. He took pains in preparing a delicious cold meal. The salmon was cooked to perfection, and the hollandaise sauce had just the right hint of something tart beneath its blandness.

The evening was not a success. Lucy had on a long dress and Bertie wore a smart velvet jacket, but Sylvia was dressed in sky-

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blue trousers and a vivid shirt, and the two men wore open-necked shirts and had a distinctly unkempt appearance. They had obviously been drinking before they arrived. Wallington tossed down Bertie's expensive hock as though it were water, and then said that South African wine had more flavor than that German stuff.

"You're from Durban, I believe, Mr. Wallington." Lucy fixed him with her Admiral's-lady glance. "My husband and I were there in the sixties, and thought it delightful. Do you happen to know the Morrows or the Page-Manleys? Mary Page-Manley gave such delightful parties."

Wallington looked at her from under heavy brows. "Don't know them."

"You have an export business in Durban?"

"That's right."

There was an awkward pause. Then Sylvia said, "Alf's trying to persuade us to pay him a visit out there."

"I'd like you to come out. Don't mind about him." Wallington jerked a thumb at Jimmy. "Believe me. we'd have a good time."

"I do believe you, Alf." She gave her head-back laugh, showing the fine column of her neck. "It's something we've forgotten here—how to have a good time."

Jimmy Purchase had been silent during dinner. Now he said, "People here just don't have the money. Like the song says, it's money makes the world go round."

"The trouble in Britain is that too much money has got into the wrong hands." Lucy looked round the table. Nobody seemed inclined to argue the point. "There are too many grubby little people with sticky fingers."

"I wish some of the green stuff would stick to my fingers," Jimmy said, and hiccuped. Bertie realized with horror that he was drunk. "We're broke, Sylvie, old girl."

"Oh, shut up."

"You don't believe me?" And he actually began to empty out his pockets. What appalling creatures the two men were, each as bad as the other. Bertie longed for the evening to end, and was delighted when Lucy rose to make a stately departure. He whispered an apology in the hall, but she told him not to be foolish, it had been fascinating.

When he returned, Wallington said, "What an old battleaxe. *Did you happen to know the Page-Manleys*. Didn't know they were still around, people like that."

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Sylvia was looking at Bertie. "Alf, you're shocking our host."

"Sorry, man, but honest, I thought they kept her sort in museums. Stuffed."

"You mustn't say stuffed. That'll shock Bertie too."

Bertie said stiffly, "I am not in the least shocked, but I certainly regard it as the height of bad manners to criticize a guest in such a manner. Lucy is a very dear friend of mine."

Sylvia at least had some understanding of his feelings. She said sorry and smiled, so that he was at once inclined to forgive her. Then she said it was time she took her rough diamonds home.

"Thanks for the grub," Wallington said. Then he leaned across the dining table and shouted, "Wake up, man, it's tomorrow morning already." Jimmy had fallen asleep in his chair. He was hauled to his feet and supported across the garden.

Bertie called up Lucy the next morning and apologized again. She said he should think no more about it. "I didn't take to that South African feller, though. Shouldn't be surprised if he turns out to be a bad hat. And I didn't care too much for your neighbors, if you don't mind my being frank."

Bertie said of course not, although he reflected that there seemed to be a sudden spasm of frankness among his acquaintances. Mrs. Purchase, Lucy said, had a roving eye. She left it at that, and they went on to discuss the agenda for the next meeting of the historical society.

Later in the morning there was a knock on the door. Jimmy was there, hollow-eyed and slightly green. " 'Fraid we rather blotted our copybook last night. Truth is, Alf and I were fairly well loaded before we came round. Can't remember too much about it, but Syl said apologies were in order."

Bertie asked when Sylvia's cousin was leaving. Jimmy Purchase shrugged and said he didn't know. Bertie nearly said that he ought not to leave the man alone with Sylvia, but refrained. He might be inquisitive, but he was also discreet.

A couple of nights later he was doing some weeding in the garden when he heard voices raised in Linton House. One was Jimmy's, the other belonged to Sylvia. They were in the sitting room shouting at each other, not quite loudly enough for the words to be distinguishable. It was maddening not to know what was being said. Bertie moved along the fence separating the gardens, until he was as near as he could get without being seen. He was now able to hear a few phrases.

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"Absolutely sick of it . . . drink because it takes my mind off . . . told you we have to wait . . ." That was Jimmy.

Then Sylvia's voice, shrill as he had never heard it, shrill and sneering. "Tell me the old, old story . . . how long do we bloody well wait then . . . you said it would be finished by now." An indistinguishable murmur from Jimmy. "None of your business," she said. More murmuring. "None of your business what I do." Murmur murmur. "You said yourself we're broke." To this there was some reply. Then she said clearly, "I shall do what I like."

"*All right*," Jimmy said, so loudly that Bertie fairly jumped. There followed a sharp crack, which sounded like hand on flesh.

Sylvia said, "You damn—that's it, then."

Nothing more. No sound, no speech. Bertie waited five minutes and then tiptoed away, fearful of being seen. Once indoors again he felt quite shaky, and had to restore himself by a nip of brandy.

What had the conversation meant? Much of it was plain enough. Sylvia was saying that it was none of her husband's business if she carried on an affair. But what was it they had to wait for, what was it that should have been finished? A deal connected with the odious Alf? And where was Alf, who as Bertie had noticed went out into the village very little?

He slept badly, and was wakened in the middle of the night by a piercing, awful scream. He sat up in bed quivering, but the sound was not repeated. He decided that he must have been having a nightmare.

On the following day the car was not in the garage. Had Jimmy gone off again? He met Sylvia out shopping in the village, and she said that he had been called to an assignment on short notice.

"What sort of assignment?" He had asked before for the name of the paper Jimmy worked on, to be told that he was a freelance.

"A Canadian magazine. He's up in the Midlands, may be away a few days."

Should he say something about the row? But that would have been indiscreet, and in any case Sylvia had such a wild look in her eye that he did not care to ask further questions. It was on that morning that he read about the Small Bank Robbers.

The Small Bank Robbers had been news for some months. They specialized in fast well-organized raids on banks, and had carried out nearly 20 of these in the past year. Several men were involved in each raid. They were armed, and did not hesitate to use coshes or revolvers when necessary. In one bank a screaming woman cus-

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tomer had suffered a fractured skull when hit over the head, and in another a guard who resisted the robbers had been shot and killed.

The diminutive applied to them—small—referred to the banks they robbed, not to their own physical dimensions. A bank clerk who had admitted giving information to the gang had asked why they were interested in his small branch bank, and had been told that they always raided small banks because they were much more vulnerable than large ones. After the arrest of this clerk the robbers seemed to have gone underground. There had been no news of them for the last three weeks.

Bertie had heard about the Small Bank Robbers, but took no particular interest in them. He was a nervous man, and did not care to read about crime. On this morning, however, his eye was caught by the heading: "Small Bank Robbers. The South African Connection." The story was a feature by the paper's crime reporter, Derek Holmes. He said that Scotland Yard knew the identities of some of the robbers, and described his own investigations, which led to the conclusion that three or four of them were in Spain. The article continued:

"But there is another connection, and a sinister one. The men in Spain are small fry. My researches suggest that the heavy men who organized the robberies, and were very ready to use violence, came from South Africa. They provided the funds and the muscle. Several witnesses who heard the men talking to each other or giving orders during the raids have said that they used odd accents. This has been attributed to the sound distortion caused by the stocking masks they wore, but two men I spoke to, both of whom have spent time in South Africa, said that they had *no doubt the accent was South African*."

The writer suggested that these men were now probably back in South Africa. But supposing that one of them was still in England, that he knew Jimmy and Sylvia and had a hold over them? Supposing, even, that Jimmy and Sylvia were minor members of the gang themselves? The thought made Bertie shiver with fright and excitement. What should or could he do about it? And where had Jimmy Purchase gone?

Again he slept badly, and when he did fall into a doze it was a short one. He dreamed that Wallington was knocking on the door. Once inside the house the South African drew out a huge wad of notes, said that there was enough for everybody, and counted out

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bundles which he put on the table between them with a small decisive *thwack*. A second bundle, *thwack*, and a third, *thwack*. How many more? He tried to cry out, to protest, but the bundles went on, *thwack, thwack, thwack* . . .

He sat up in bed, crying out something inaudible. The thin gray light of early morning came through the curtains. There was a sound in the garden outside, a sound regularly repeated, the *thwack* of his dream. It took him, in his slightly dazed state, a little while to realize that if he went to the window he might see what was causing the sound. He tiptoed across the room and raised the curtain. He was trembling.

It was still almost dark, and whatever was happening was taking place at the back of Linton House, so that he could not see it. But as he listened to the regularly repeated sound, he had no doubt of its nature. Somebody was digging out there. The sound of the spade digging earth had entered his dream, and there was an occasional clink when it struck a stone. Why would somebody be digging at this time in the morning? He remembered that terrible cry on the previous night, the cry he had thought to be a dream. Supposing it had been real, who had cried out?

The digging stopped and two people spoke, although he could not hear the words or even the tones. One, light and high in pitch, was no doubt Sylvia's, but was the other voice Wallington's? And if it was, had Jimmy Purchase gone away at all?

In the half light a man and woman were briefly visible before they passed into the house. The man carried a spade, but his head was down and Bertie could not see his face, only his square bulky figure. He had little doubt that the man was Wallington.

That morning he went up to London. He had visited the city rarely since his retirement, finding that on each visit he was more worried and confused. The place seemed continually to change, so that what had been a landmark of some interest was now a kebab or hamburger restaurant. The article had appeared in the *Banner*, and their offices had moved from Fleet Street to somewhere off the Gray's Inn Road. He asked for Arnold Grayson, a deputy editor he had known slightly, to be told that Grayson had moved to another paper. He had to wait almost an hour before he was able to talk to Derek Holmes. The crime reporter remained staring at his desk while he listened to Bertie's story. During the telling of it Holmes chewed gum and said "Yup" occasionally.

"Yup," he said again at the end. "Okay, Mr. Mays. Thanks."

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"What are you going to do about it?"

Holmes removed his gum and considered the question. "Know how many people been in touch about that piece, saying they've seen the robbers, their landlord's one of them, they heard two South Africans talking in a bus about how the loot should be split, et cetera? One hundred and eleven. Half of 'em are sensationalists, the other half plain crazy."

"But this is different."

"They're all different. I shouldn'ta seen you only you mentioned Arnie, and he was a good friend. But what's it amount to? Husband and wife having a shindig, husband goes off, South African cousin's digging a flowerbed—"

"At that time in the morning?"

The reporter shrugged. "People are funny."

"Have you got pictures of the South Africans you say are involved in the robberies? If I could recognize Wallington—"

Holmes put another piece of gum in his mouth, chewed on it meditatively, then produced half a dozen photographs. None of them resembled Wallington. Holmes shuffled the pictures together and put them away. "That's it then."

"But aren't you going to come down and look into it? I tell you I believe murder has been done. Wallington is her lover. Together they have killed Purchase."

"If Wallington's lying low with his share of the loot, the last thing he'd do is get involved in this sort of caper. You know your trouble, Mr. Mays? You've got an overheated imagination."

If only he knew somebody at Scotland Yard! But there was no reason to think that they would take him any more seriously than the newspaperman had. He returned feeling both chastened and frustrated. To his surprise Sylvia got out of another carriage on the train. She greeted him cheerfully.

"Hallo, Bertie. I've just been seeing Alf off."

"Seeing Alf off?" he echoed stupidly.

"Back to South Africa. He had a letter saying they needed him back there."

"Back in Durban?"

"That's right."

"Jimmy said he was from the Cape."

"Did he? Jimmy often gets things wrong."

It was not in Bertie's nature to be anything but gallant to a lady, even one he suspected of being a partner in murder. "Now that you

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are a grass widow again, you must come in and have a dish of tea."

"That would be lovely."

"Tomorrow?"

"It's a date."

They had reached his cottage. She pressed two fingers to her lips, touched his cheek with them. Inside the cottage the telephone was ringing. It was Holmes.

"Mr. Mays? Thought you'd like to know. Your chum Purchase is just what he said, a freelance journalist. One or two of the boys knew him. Not too successful from what I hear."

"So you did pay some attention to what I told you!"

"Always try and check a story out. Nothing to this one, far as I can see."

"Wallington has gone back to South Africa. Suddenly, just like that."

"Has he now? Good luck to him."

Triumph was succeeded by indignation. He put down the telephone without saying goodbye.

Was it all the product of an overheated imagination? He made scones for Sylvia's visit next day and served them with his homemade blackcurrant preserve. Then he put the question that still worried him. He would have liked to introduce it delicately, but somehow didn't manage that.

"What was all that digging in the garden early the other morning?"

Sylvia looked startled, and then exclaimed as a fragment of the scone she was eating dropped onto her dress. When it had been removed she said, "Sorry you were disturbed. It was Timmy."

"Timmy?"

"Our tabby. He must have eaten something poisoned and he died. Poor Timmy. Alf dug a grave and we gave him Christian burial." With hardly a pause she went on, "We're clearing out at the end of the week."

"Leaving?" For a moment he could hardly believe it.

"Right. I'm a London girl at heart, you know, always was. The idea of coming here was that Jimmy would be able to do some writing of his own, but that never seemed to work out—he was always being called away. If I'm in London I can get a job, earn some money. Very necessary at the moment. If Alf hadn't helped out, I don't know what we'd have done. It was a crazy idea coming down here, but then we're crazy people."

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And at the end of that week Sylvia went. Since the house had been rented furnished, she had only suitcases to take away. She came to say goodbye. There was no sign of Jimmy, and Bertie asked about him.

"Still up on that job. But anyway he wouldn't have wanted to come down and help, he hates things like that. Goodbye, Bertie, we'll meet again I expect." A quick kiss on the cheek and she was driving off in her rented car.

She departed leaving all sorts of questions unanswered when Bertie came to think about it, mundane ones like an address if anybody should want to get in touch with her or with Jimmy, and things he would have liked to know, such as the reason for digging the cat's grave at such an extraordinary hour. He found himself more and more suspicious of the tale she had told. The row he had overheard could perhaps be explained by lack of money, but it seemed remarkable that Jimmy Purchase had not come back.

Linton House was locked up and empty, but it was easy enough to get into the garden. The area dug up was just inside the boundary fence. It was difficult to see how much had been dug because there was a patch of earth at each side, but it looked like a large area to bury a cat.

On impulse one day, a week after Sylvia had gone, Bertie took a spade into the garden and began to dig. It proved to be quite hard work, and he went down two feet before reaching the body. It was that of a cat, one he vaguely remembered seeing in the house, but Sylvia's story of its death had been untrue. Its head was mangled, shattered by one or two heavy blows.

Bertie looked at the cat with distaste—he did not care for seeing dead things—returned it, and had just finished shoveling back the earth when he was hailed from the road. He turned, and with a sinking heart saw the local constable, P.C. Harris, standing beside his bicycle.

"Ah, it's you, Mr. Mays. I was thinking it might be somebody with burglarious intent. Somebody maybe was going to dig a tunnel to get entrance into the house. But perhaps it was your *own* house you was locked out of." P.C. Harris was well known as a local wag, and nobody laughed more loudly at his own jokes. He laughed heartily now. Bertie joined in feebly.

"But what *was* you doing digging in the next-door garden, may I ask?"

What could he say? I was digging for a man, but only found a cat?

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Desperately Bertie said, "I'd—ah—lost something and thought it might have got in here. I was just turning the earth."

The constable shook his head. "You was trespassing, Mr. Mays. This is not your property."

"No, of course not. It won't happen again. I'd be glad if you could forget it." He approached the constable, a pound note in his hand.

"No need for that, sir, which might be construed as a bribe and hence an offense in itself. I shall not be reporting the matter on this occasion, nor inquiring further into the whys and wherefores, but would strongly advise you in future to keep within the bounds of your own property."

Pompous old fool, Bertie thought, but said that of course he would do just that. He scrambled back into his own garden, aware that he made a slightly ludicrous figure. P.C. Harris, in a stately manner, mounted his bicycle and rode away.

That was almost, but not quite, the end of the story.

Linton House was empty for a few weeks and then rented again, to a family called Hobson who had two noisy children. Bertie had as little to do with them as possible. He was very conscious of having been made to look a fool, and there was nothing he disliked more than that. He was also aware of a disinclination in himself to enter Linton House again.

In the late spring of the following year he went to Sardinia for a holiday, driving around on his own, looking at the curious nuraghi and the burial places made from gigantic blocks of stone which are called the tombs of the giants. He drove up the western coast in a leisurely way, spending long mornings and afternoons over lunches and dinners in the small towns, and then moving inland to bandit country. He was sitting nursing a drink in a square at Nuoro, which is the capital of the central province, when he heard his name called.

It was Sylvia, so brown that he hardly recognized her. "Bertie, what are you doing here?"

He said that he was on holiday, and returned the question.

"Just come down to shop. We have a house up in the hills—you must come and see it. Darling, look who's here."

A bronzed Jimmy Purchase approached across the square. Like Sylvia he seemed in fine spirits, and endorsed enthusiastically the suggestion that Bertie should come out to their house. It was a few miles from the city on the slopes of Mount Ortobene, a long low white modern house at the end of a rough road. They sat in a courtyard and ate grilled fish, and drank a hard dry local white wine.

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Bertie felt his natural curiosity rising. How could he ask questions without appearing to be—well—nosy? Over coffee he said that he supposed Jimmy was out here on an assignment.

It was Sylvia who answered. "Oh, no, he's given all that up since the book was published."

"The book?"

"Show him, Jimmy." Jimmy went into the house. He returned with a book which said on the cover *My Tempestuous Life. As told by Anita Sorana to Jimmy Purchase.*

"You've heard of her?"

It would have been difficult not to have heard of Anita Sorana. She was a screen actress famous equally for her temperament, her five well-publicized marriages, and the variety of her love affairs.

"It was fantastic luck when she agreed that Jimmy should write her autobiography. It was all very hush hush and we had to pretend that he was off on assignments when he was really with Anita."

Jimmy took it up. "Then she'd break appointments, say she wasn't in the mood to talk. A few days afterwards she'd ask to see me at a minute's notice. Then Sylvia started to play up—"

"I thought he was having an affair with her. She certainly fancied him. He swears he wasn't, but I don't know. Anyway, it was worth it." She yawned.

"The book was a success?"

Jimmy grinned, teeth very white in his brown face. "I'll say. Enough for me to shake off the dust of Fleet Street."

So the quarrel was explained, and Jimmy's sudden absences, and his failure to return. After a glass of some fiery local liqueur Bertie felt soporific, conscious that he had drunk a little more than usual. There was some other question he wanted to ask, but he did not remember it until they were driving him down the mountain, back to his hotel in Nuoro.

"How is your cousin?"

Jimmy was driving. "Cousin?"

"Mr. Wallington, Sylvia's cousin from South Africa."

Sylvia, from the back of the car, said, "Alf's dead."

"Dead!"

"In a car accident. Soon after he got back to South Africa. Wasn't it sad?"

Very few more words were spoken before they reached the hotel and said goodbye. The heat of the hotel room and the wine he had drunk made Bertie fall asleep at once. After a couple of hours he

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woke, sweating, and wondered if he believed what he had been told. Was it possible to make enough money from "ghosting" (he had heard that was the word) a life story to retire to Sardinia? It seemed unlikely. He lay on his back in the dark room, and it seemed to him that he saw with terrible clarity what had happened.

Wallington was one of the Small Bank Robbers, and he had come to the Purchases looking for a safe place to stay. He had his money, what Holmes had called the loot, with him, and they had decided to kill him for it. The quarrel had been about when Wallington would be killed, the sound that wakened him in the night had been Wallington's death cry.

Jimmy had merely pretended to go away that night, and had returned to help Sylvia dispose of the body. Jimmy dug the grave and they put Wallington in it. Then the cat had been killed and put into a shallow grave on top of the body. It was the killing of the cat, those savage blows on its head, that somehow horrified Bertie most.

He cut short his holiday and took the next plane back. At home he walked round to the place where he had dug up the cat. The Hobsons had put in bedding plants, and the wallflowers were flourishing. He had read somewhere that flowers always flourished over a grave.

"Not thinking of trespassing again, I hope, Mr. Mays?"

It was P.C. Harris, red-faced and jovial.

Bertie shook his head. What he had imagined in the hotel room might be true, but then again it might not. Supposing that he went to the police, supposing he was able to convince them that there was something in his story, supposing they dug up the flowerbed and found nothing but the cat? He would be the laughingstock of the neighborhood.

Bertie Mays knew that he would say nothing.

"I reckon you was feeling a little bit eccentric that night you was doing the digging," P.C. Harris said sagely.

"Yes, I think I must have been."

"They make a fine show, them wallflowers. Makes you more cheerful, seeing spring flowers."

"Yes," said Bertie Mays meekly. "They make a fine show."

"Q"

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a *NEW* short-short by

ROBERT L. FISH

It was a needle-in-a-haystack case until "suddenly Joe leaned forward, his eyes narrowing almost to slits as they do when he gets to thinking hard" . . .

THE ART OF DEDUCTION

by ***ROBERT L. FISH***

We had just come back from having some food in a greasy spoon when the call came through, or at least that's when we first heard it. The dispatcher sounded irked, but he usually sounded irked.

"Car 63! Car 63!"

"That's us," I said.

"Too true," Joe Rouse said—he's my partner—and pushed a button. "Car 63," he said.

The dispatcher came on, querulous. "Where you guys been?"

"Having lunch," Joe said. "We always do. Why?"

"We got a bank job here," the dispatcher said. "City Farmers Trust. They got away with eighteen thousand and change in an overnight bag. We think they may be heading your way."

Joe was busy scribbling notes while I started the engine and got ready to roll. Joe paused and looked at the car speaker. "How long ago?"

"Roughly thirty minutes," the dispatcher said. "Time to get to your area if they're headed that way."

Joe jerked his thumb at me; I knew what he meant and headed for the nearest entrance to the turnpike. Joe nodded his agreement and went back to the car speaker. "What kind of car?"

This time the dispatcher's voice was more disgusted than irked.

"We got three witnesses, so of course we got three descriptions.

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One says it was a dark green Ford, practically new; another says it was dark blue, not green, and he's almost positive it was a Pontiac four, five years old, because his brother-in-law's got one just like it; while the third simply says it was black and he has no notion as to what make or year. About all they agree on," the dispatcher added sourly, "is that it wasn't a polkadot striped station wagon."

"Normal," Joe said. "Did anyone at least notice was it a two-door or a four?"

"One guy said two, one said four, and the third didn't notice."

"I'm beginning to like the third guy best," Joe said. "Did anyone bother to notice how many guys were in on the job?"

"Witnesses say they couldn't tell if there were two or three in the car; it was too far away. People in the bank say only one guy did the stickup there, and there was the driver, but there could have been others inside the car."

"That's fine," Joe said, and sighed. "With witnesses like you got, they could drop people off, pick 'em up, switch cars, anything. With witnesses like you got, they could even park the car, take a bus, split the dough, and give the bus driver a cut."

"What do you want from me?" the dispatcher asked.

"Sympathy," I said, leaning over and getting into the act.

"Who's that, Fenner? You got it," the dispatcher said, and for the first time he sounded happy. "The captain says you guys got to stay on patrol until further notice. Or until the bank robbers are caught, whichever comes first. I think maybe he's got stock in the bank. Heh, heh!" And the speaker went dead.

"That four-letter word!" I said bitterly, "or a couple of them! And I got a heavy date for tonight!" I jammed on the accelerator in frustration, angled into the turnpike entrance with a squeal, speeded up, and managed to edge into traffic without being sideswiped. "Of all times!"

"Don't worry about it," Joe said, not impressed, and jerked his thumb toward the shoulder of the highway. "You trying to race them to the border, Fenner? Pull over!"

"Oh! Yeah," I said a bit shamefacedly, and pulled from the turnpike, bumping to a halt on the shoulder, but keeping the car engine running. I stared out at the hundreds of cars that flashed by, trying to pick out a blue one, or a green one, or a black one, or the two-door or four-door ones, or the ones with two guys or maybe three guys or maybe more guys in them, and I wondered what we were doing here when we had no idea if the bank robbers were even

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heading our way, or what color car they were driving, or the make or model, or how many passengers were in it. And if I knew the captain, we'd still be sitting here at midnight if the guys weren't picked up somewhere before then, or if they didn't just drive into some station and confess!

Suddenly Joe leaned forward, his eyes narrowing almost to slits as they do when he gets to thinking hard. His big hand came out, squeezing my leg above the knee painfully.

"Let's go, Fenner! Move it!"

I stepped on the gas, as much out of reflex to that painful grip as to his yell, spurting onto the road between a semi-trailer and a big truck, barely missing being squooshed, buffeted by the backlash of the wind from the semi and the blast of an outraged horn from the truck, swaying wildly a moment to get control, and finally settling down between the two monsters speeding along just under 70. I glanced over at Joe.

"Where we going?"

"Just stay behind that semi!" he said grimly.

"Right!" I said, mystified, and then suddenly had to touch my brakes as the trailer's directional lights flashed on and the huge semi pulled to the left to pass a car.

"There!" Joe said, pointing. "That dark sedan! Let's get them!"

I put on the flasher and siren and at the same time cut sharply in front of the sedan, forcing it to brake and spin onto the shoulder, twisting, almost into the guard-rail before it came to a shuddering stop, the truck shooting by us, its horn blaring, almost taking off my tail. I wondered what on earth had come over Joe, but he was already out of the car and had his gun on the men in the sedan before they could begin to recover from the shock of being stopped so suddenly. And when they did I was there on the other side of the car and the three were climbing down and lining up, leaning against the side of the sedan while Joe frisked them.

We found the money wedged under the back seat, $18,000 plus in an overnight bag, and we brought it in with our three prisoners. But I still couldn't understand how Joe had spotted the car. Joe explained when we went out for a shot and a beer, which he properly felt we had earned.

"Man!" he said wonderingly. "Who goes 55 miles per hour on a highway today? You go 55 and you better have a ramp on top of your car so they can go over you, because otherwise they'll go right through you!"

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"True," I said, still puzzled, "but—"

"The only guys going 55 are guys who don't want to be stopped, can't afford to be stopped, can't take a chance of being stopped," Joe said. "So when I see this car just ambling along, staying inside the limit—"

He shrugged. "And you notice the car was gray, not green or blue or black? And it was a Chevy? Witnesses!" he said with a grimace, and raised his glass.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

FATAL EXCHANGE

by PALMINA STEPHENS

The clock struck one. The deed was done.
She poisoned dear old Harry.
Then *her* throat burned. Too late she learned
Dear Harry switched the sherry.

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"Q"

THE KILLER KILLED

by FRANK FILLERY

I murdered the poet sublime—
I frankly admit to the crime.
He hacked at his verse,
It couldn't be worse—
His endings were never in rhyme.

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a *NEW* suspense story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

William Bankier has a "special touch" when his theme deals with music—you can hear it, you can feel *it. Something was happening to the Summer Concert Series broadcast from Trinity Hall. Why was the Metralia Symphony, a super orchestra of the finest musicians, with an internationally famous conductor and the best audio engineers—why was the great Met so lifeless? . . .*

THE WOMAN IN THE CONTROL ROOM

by ***WILLIAM BANKIER***

Clive Bracewell called a production meeting on the day he was assigned to take over responsibility for the symphony broadcasts. The team sat around his office looking into their coffee. They acted as if they expected him to pronounce death sentences. Well, he could certainly have them transferred to less prestigious programs. But he would never do that; these were the best sound engineers employed by the network. Unfortunately their recent work was below par.

"What is it?" he asked. "Have you lost the upper end of your hearing, Barry? Is that it, ladies and gentlemen? Has Barry gone tone deaf?"

Barry Thompson was chief engineer on the program. He sat at the big console in the control room in Trinity Hall and turned the knobs that balanced the feed coming from the battery of microphones suspended above the orchestra. Barry could make or break a broadcast on his own.

The suggestion that Barry Thompson was losing his ear raised a smile around the room. They were all there—the producer; the audio men; Grimmond, the announcer who had been doing the Sum-

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mer Concert Series for decades; the script assistant—everybody.

"Then is it the orchestra?" Bracewell asked. "Is the Metralia Symphony Orchestra going downhill?"

Barry Thompson spoke for them all when he said, "The Met is the finest orchestra in the East. One of the three best in the country. They haven't lost a thing."

"Well, something is wrong. I know you all love old Parsegian who had this job until last week. And you probably look on me as some young upstart who wants to jump in and make waves as soon as he takes over."

Bracewell paused in case anybody cared to register a polite objection, but the only sound in the office was the clatter of a distant typewriter and the pop of a coffee container being crushed in Barry Thompson's fist.

"But the quality of the programs," Bracewell continued, "is deteriorating. I listened to the last three and it was noticeable. No life. Parsegian is a year away from retirement and I think his ear *is* gone. Or else his mind is on green pastures. Anyway, it's obvious to me that this whole operation needs tightening up. If everybody just concentrates, there's no reason why we can't spring right back and become again the class show on the network. Is that fair enough?"

There was a general murmur of assent around the room. They wanted him to finish so they could get away.

He decided to tell them what he believed. "There are not many fine things in the world," Bracewell said. "There never have been many. Classical music is one. Baseball is another. And painting. But the second-raters can't let any of it alone. Painting now is sand and glue and broken bottles—and don't let anybody pretend it's for the sake of creativity. It's because sand-and-glue so-called painting is easier than mastering true technique." Bracewell felt the heat in his face. "Baseball has been diluted by greed. They've expanded the major leagues till we have nine hundred teams manned mostly by borderline players. They lack talent, so they substitute hair and mustaches and arguments over money. All hoke and show."

Thompson was looking at him, so Bracewell directed his final words to the chief engineer. "But Brahms's Third Symphony is man at his best. We can't improve it, we can only reproduce it exactly as he created it. Brahms dreamed perfection and we must strive to achieve it."

Bracewell was pleased when Barry Thompson responded. "We

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care about the music," Thompson continued. "And this whole team is doing the very best it can. I can swear to that."

"That's all I want," Bracewell said. "Give me your best and I won't ask for more."

That night Bracewell sat down in his apartment in a comfortable chair placed to receive the optimum sound from his stereo speakers. He poured himself a glass of chilled chablis and settled back to listen to the broadcast live from Trinity Hall.

After the time signal came, first, the exciting burst of ambience, the atmosphere of the crowded auditorium heard as the lines are opened and before the announcer speaks. "Good evening from Trinity Hall." Grimmond's distinguished voice was pure gold, ageless and just cultured enough without sounding snobbish. "Tonight we are to hear the Metralia Symphony Orchestra in a varied program including the Vivaldi Gloria in D major, followed by a brief taste of Bach, the Cantata Number 50, and then our major work, Handel's Concerto Grosso Number 25 in F major, the Water Music."

Bracewell closed his eyes. The preliminaries took place—the cacophony of tuning up, the applause as the concert master made his entrance followed by the greater applause for the conductor. The excitement of the audience was reduced to that most fragile of silences, then the tap of the baton on the podium, and—Vivaldi!

But the quality was not there. As the program progressed, a frown developed on Clive Bracewell's face and stayed there. There was still no life. Thompson was right about the orchestra—they were the best. But there was an air of lethargy about the performance. Could it be microphone placement? Mixing in the control room?

Even the audience seemed let down and their applause was muted. Bracewell snapped off the radio at the end of the concert and went to wash his wine glass and stand it in the drain. The Summer Concert Series was the peak musical event of the year. Six weeks in length, a concert every night, it had been running for almost 50 years. Parsegian had been retired with three weeks remaining in the current series. It was a golden opportunity for Bracewell to make his influence felt, and he intended to do just that.

Tomorrow night he would attend the concert in the hall and see for himself what was going on.

Trinity was usually sold out for the Summer Series but a few tickets were retained for visiting celebrities, and Bracewell had his secretary obtain one of these. He dressed for the concert—what was considered dressing these days when white tie and dinner jacket

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were seldom worn—putting on a dark suit, white ruffled shirt, and wine velvet butterfly tie, slipping his feet into his black patent-leather shoes. The outfit went well with his vacation tan. He would stand out at the hall where today's audience wore whatever they liked from bush jackets to T-shirts with advertising on them. Well, at least they loved classical music, so they could not be all bad.

Bracewell arrived in good time and made a quick visit to the control room where Barry and his broadcast crew were settling in. "Evening, all," he said. The console dials glowed with yellow light, the decibel needles now at rest. Beyond the broad glass window could be seen the auditorium, its 7000 seats just beginning to receive the early birds, the vast stage a geometric arrangement of empty chairs and music stands.

"Hi, Chief," Thompson said. "Checking to see we really show up here?" There was an edge to his voice now, not present during yesterday's meeting.

"All I want is to hear justice done to the music," Bracewell said.

"Amen," the engineer said. The control room was his castle and his crew knew it. There was an atmosphere of silent rallying round. Bracewell decided to be on his way. Through a small window to the side he saw Grimmond sitting alone in the announcer's booth. Grimmond lifted a hand in blasé greeting. Bracewell opened the connecting door and entered the booth, closing the door behind him.

"Mr. Grimmond, sir," he said. Bracewell never hesitated to respect another man's age. It worked two ways. It showed harmless reverence and, at the same time, emphasized an implied infirmity.

"Hello, Clive. Come to see the troops?"

Bracewell sat down in the spare chair, the microphone between himself and the elderly announcer. "I'm still worried," he said. "I listened at home last night."

"And—?"

"Bad."

Grimmond said nothing.

"You must notice it," Bracewell said. "You've been doing these concerts for years. You've heard them all. Here we are with a super orchestra, an internationally famous conductor, the class of the audio world next door—and yet it sounds about seventy-five percent. Mr. Grimmond, sir, explain this mystery to me."

Grimmond turned a page of his script, idly, as if his next line of dialogue was written there. He shrugged. "Mystery is the right word," he said. "It's as if . . ."

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"Yes. Go on and say it. Whatever you think, don't be afraid."

"It's silly. I've nothing to tell you, really. But it reminds me of what I always heard about a boxer. They'd keep him away from his woman during the weeks before a fight because if he went with her it would take it out of him." Grimmond smiled in self-deprecation. "I don't know. These broadcasts sound that way to me—as if they've left it somewhere else."

The control room was studiously silent when Bracewell passed through heading for the auditorium. Only then did he realize that Grimmond's microphone could easily have been turned on. Thompson and the others must have heard the conversation, heard that he was still dissatisfied, still searching. Well, let them know. It might keep them on their toes.

The inferior quality of the music was less noticeable in Trinity Hall than it had been over the radio at home. This was understandable: Trinity's acoustics were not that great and there was all the visual input of crowd and conductor and musicians to dilute the critical faculties. But still there was no denying that the orchestra was below par. The program included Mendelssohn's Symphony Number 3 in A minor, the Scottish, one of Bracewell's favorites, and it just did not sing the way it should have.

It was during this work that Bracewell noticed the woman in the control room. He looked across the wide expanse of the auditorium and through the glass front of the booth built in below the mezzanine boxes. Thompson and his team were masked by the dark line of the console but there was a pool of dim light against the wall behind them. She stood there, leaning against the wall, her arms folded across her chest. She wore a pale-blue dress with short sleeves. Her hair seemed light in color and was swept up on top of her head. The effect was as if she wore a crown. It was hard to tell in the dim light, but her eyes seemed to be closed.

Bracewell watched for some time and then an astonishing feeling came over him. He felt she was looking back at him. But that was absurd; in the crowded hall and at this distance, to imagine their eyes would meet—it was preposterous. He looked away, watched the conductor for a few minutes, then looked back. She had not moved and the feeling that they were observing each other was stronger than ever.

The concert ended, another disappointment for Bracewell. The audience response was enthusiastic but the musicians took only a taste of it and then were gone from the stage. It was as if they all

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had trains and planes to catch. As he filed out, Bracewell looked up again at the control room. The light was out, the place empty. Thompson and company had fled like thieves in the night.

The next day he saw the chief engineer in the corridor and mentioned the woman to him. "You know, Barry, it might improve the quality of the broadcast if you kept your girl friend out of the control room."

"Girl friend? I'm not with you."

"The woman in the control room. Last night. I saw her, a blonde in a blue dress."

"Oh, her." Thompson's eyes leveled and Bracewell had a feeling he was on the verge of opening up, that he was about to reveal some secret. Then the gate swung shut. "She's no girl friend of mine. I thought you knew . . . I'm gay." He grinned in such a way as to make the statement a challenge. "Anyway, she had nothing to do with the quality of the program. If you didn't like it, fire me."

All at once Bracewell felt defeated. "I don't want to fire anybody, Barry. All I want is for everybody to give me their best."

He attended the concert for the second night in a row. This time he avoided the control room, arrived just in time, and went directly to his seat. He refused to admit to himself that he was excited about the possibility of the woman being there again, yet for the first quarter hour he kept his eyes rigidly fixed on the orchestra. Only then, when the Mozart Serenade in D major was completed, did he turn his head and look toward the glass panel.

She was there. Her dress tonight was black with sleeves puffed at the shoulder. Her face looked pale against the dark material. Again Bracewell found himself drawn into a staring contest across 50 yards of open space, never really certain she was even aware of him in the crowded hall. She might have been looking at the back of Barry Thompson's head.

It was later, after the intermission, during the performance of the major work, Dvorak's Symphony Number 8 in G major, that she smiled at him. The soaring final movement was lifting him up and while the brass and percussion thundered through a soul-shaking passage, he looked into the control room and saw her move slightly to one side into a brighter patch of light. Then she smiled, and he knew it was directed at him. He smiled back and felt they were alone in this mass of people.

The applause at the end of the symphony was like thunder. Some younger members of the audience could not contain their enthusi-

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asm, were shouting like fans at a football game. Bracewell looked again at the woman in the control room and saw her raise her cupped hand to her mouth and tip her head in an imitation of drinking. Then she pointed to the doorway and smiled at him. Bracewell nodded, got to his feet, and moved along the aisle, his heart pounding. Quick as he was in leaving the hall, he noticed the orchestra had taken minimum bows again and were hurrying from the stage.

He left the auditorium, climbed a flight of stairs to the mezzanine, and strode through a shuffling crowd round the circular hall to the exit nearest the control room. She was waiting there. In the distance Barry Thompson and his assistant were just departing through a side door.

"Hello," she said in a cool voice. "You got my message." She was taller than Bracewell had imagined; their eyes were on a level. Hers were palest green. With everything about her so faintly colored—hair, complexion, those penetrating eyes—she was like a preliminary sketch for a portrait.

"I seem to have been getting messages for some time," he said.

She laughed, but her heart was not in it. "Then you did notice me yesterday. I wondered. Can we go somewhere and talk?"

They were passing the doorway of the announcer's booth as Grimmond came out. His glance passed quickly between Bracewell and the woman. His smile was all-knowing. "Everybody swings but me," he said. "It's late and it's raining and I have a hole in my shoe. Ah, well, never mind. I've had Dvorak, I am sustained."

Bracewell nodded and moved after the woman, feeling strangely intent on whatever was to come.

"How do you think it went tonight?" Grimmond asked.

"Still bad," Bracewell said. "But I mean to find out why."

Grimmond was wrong about the rain. It had ended. The streets glistened, the lamps made diamond halos through the branches of trees, and from the park across the road came a heavenly smell of soaked earth.

She had a car in the private area beside the hall, a dark space vehicle of European design. He sat low beside her on soft fragrant leather and they moved silently ahead behind a panel of radiant instruments. "My name is Leonora," she said. "Leonora Miles."

Bracewell introduced himself and when she said she knew who he was, he did not know whether or not to be pleased. They were out of town in minutes, driving along a highway in the direction of distant hills. She pressed a cassette into an aperture and the dark

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cave they traveled in was filled with the music of Delius. He said, "Do you attend many concerts?"

"I used to attend them all. Lately I've been needed elsewhere."

"The Dvorak Eighth means a lot to me."

"I could tell." Her foot was touching the brake, they were slowing down.

"The Matteson variations I could live without," Bracewell said, referring to the short middle work on the program. "I'm afraid this so-called modern stuff misses me entirely."

They were heading for an exit ramp. "There's a nice place for a drink just off here."

As they reached the ramp, an air-horn sounded. Bracewell looked and saw a large gleaming bus rush by followed by an identical one, the type chartered by tourists. Both coaches were full; faces at the windows smiled down at the car as they flashed past. Some of them looked familiar to Bracewell—he thought he recognized members of the orchestra.

They drank white wine in an upholstered booth at a roadhouse that was almost deserted. Bracewell's most recent love affair had ended months ago. He was always slow to enter the battle again and now the presence of this bewitching woman so close to him was making him quite unsteady. He could only take so much of her eyes at this range, so he rested himself by looking at her high cheekbones. Her face was without makeup, the only touch of color being a stroke of blue shadow around the pale eyes.

"You said the Dvorak means a lot to you," she prompted him. "This leaves something unsaid, I think."

"Yes. It's why I've been put in this job right now, and why I appreciate the chance. The music means too much for me to permit it to deteriorate."

She seemed to know what he was talking about. "Perhaps the deterioration is only a temporary thing," she said. "Given time, it may cure itself."

"Not the way I see it. If the orchestra gets slack, or if the people in the control room start cutting corners, it can only go from bad to worse." He felt determined. "I intend to find out what the problem is and then I'm going to correct it. I've been given the authority and I mean to exercise it."

Later, after another glass of wine, she glanced at her watch and said, "I don't think I can allow you to go home just yet, Mr. Bracewell."

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"Are you kidnaping me, Mrs. Miles?" He had noticed her wedding ring.

"You might say that. For a time, anyway."

Back in the car, they resumed the drive north. Reaching the foothills, they left the highway and followed a secondary road through a nameless village, asleep at this hour of midnight. Beyond the village they arrived at a walled estate, slowed almost to a stop, and rolled in through an iron gateway onto a gravel forecourt with the lighted windows of a stone mansion ahead. As he climbed out of the car, inhaling chilly mountain air, Bracewell saw parked before the house the two buses that had passed them on the road.

"The pieces are beginning to fall into place," he said, feeling immensely confident after the wine and the drive.

She took his arm and guided him toward the entrance, up broad steps and between white pillars supporting a massive portico. "Don't make any judgments yet, Clive," she said. "Wait until you understand."

As they moved inside and through ornately furnished rooms, Bracewell said, "You must be the wealthy Mrs. Miles."

"By marriage, if you like. I never had any money of my own. My husband is Finley Miles. He is Miles Holdings, the real-estate firm."

Now the name registered with Bracewell. Half of the prestigious locations in the city, it seemed, were associated with Finley Miles enterprises.

Leonora opened a set of double doors. Immediately beyond them, a foot away, was a duplicate set. Soundproofing. She opened these and Bracewell followed her into a huge room with a high ceiling. Here, seated on collapsible chairs in the familiar arrangement, were the members of the Metralia Symphony Orchestra.

"Good lord," Bracewell said.

She chose to believe he meant the room. "This used to be the ballroom," Leonora said, a hostess smile giving life to her weary face, "until Finley had it converted."

There were microphones on stands and booms and others suspended above the orchestra. At the end of the room Bracewell saw a long window and beyond it the sober face of Barry Thompson. He registered no surprise at the sight of his boss but merely gave him a determined salute. Across the room, looking relaxed in an armchair and with a drink in his hand, was the famous conductor of the Met. Catching sight of Bracewell, he smiled and shrugged.

Leonora took his arm and led Bracewell to the podium. "Clive

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Bracewell, I'd like you to meet my husband—Finley Miles."

The podium had a railing all around it and had been made large enough to accommodate a special high chair unlike anything Bracewell had ever seen. It was upholstered in leather with broad arms and an adjustable back which could be made to recline. At the moment it was positioned straight up. The occupant was bound into the chair by a belt across his chest and one over his lap. He smiled at Bracewell and extended his hand.

Bracewell was shocked. The man was dying. The pale face of Leonora Miles could be attributed to fatigue or anxiety, but this parchment mask was the face of terminal illness. Had Finley Miles been handsome once? Probably. Now there was life only in the glowing eyes which smiled down at Bracewell as if the joke was on him. One day soon, these eyes seemed to say, you'll pass this same way.

"Sorry I can't spend time with you now," Miles said. He indicated the orchestra. "But we've got to get on."

"I understand," Bracewell said grimly.

Leonora said, "You carry on, Fin. We'll go away and listen." As they walked to the back of the hall, Finley Miles picked up a baton and found the strength to tap it authoritatively on the music stand before him.

"Tonight," he said, "we record Opus Nine." He paused and corrected himself. "I should say, this morning." The orchestra laughed.

They began to play as the couple left the hall but for Bracewell, they might have been tuning up. It was the worst sort of atonal music without melody or rhythm. Bracewell followed Leonora into the control room where Barry Thompson was occupied at his controls, his assistant supervising the giant reels of a professional tape-recording machine. He had only to listen for a few minutes to realize that this was a most amateurish composition. Even the Matteson he had detested at the concert that evening had form; in its cacophony could be detected the hand of a professional composer. But this was a pointless melange of what he would call anti-music.

He leaned close to Leonora. "I don't recognize this," he said. "Who wrote it?"

She did not look at him when she replied. "Finley wrote it. My husband," she said.

Bracewell stood back, his anger mounting while the storm of discordant sound echoed around him. It was an outrage. Through the glass he could see the members of the Met, some of the finest musicians in the country, concentrating on their scores with all the

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professional attention they had given the Dvorak. It was like seeing the New York Yankees tumbling around on a sandlot.

The selection ended and a dialogue began over the talk-back speakers between the maestro on the podium and Thompson in the control room. They were discussing whether they should re-record the "scherzo." In the end, they began a playback of the tape and Bracewell was forced to listen once more to the same incredible noise. He caught Leonora's eye at last. "How long is this going on?"

"Last night they went till five o'clock in the morning. They have a lot still to record."

He took her arm and led her out of the control room by a different door. They were in a carpeted corridor. "Is there a place where we can talk?" He could still hear the shriek of violins and the whistle of woodwinds. "Where we can't hear that awful noise?"

Her expression was unreadable. It combined what might have been resignation and injured pride. She walked a considerable distance down the corridor and showed him into a small room furnished with much-used upholstered furniture. There were books here on shelves and tables, and in the fireplace the ashes of last season's final fire. He saw all this by the light of a Tiffany lamp she switched on as they entered.

They sat facing each other on twin settees, leaning forward, not relaxed. It felt to Bracewell like some hurried back-room committee meeting at a political convention. He said, "Correct me if I'm wrong. You have been hijacking the Met Symphony night after night to come out here and work till all hours. Which explains why they have no edge for the Summer Series, why they're giving only half a performance at Trinity Hall."

"You're not wrong." Her alert eyes watched him.

"Well, that's preposterous. And it's got to stop."

"It can't stop. Not till we're finished. Not for at least a week, perhaps ten days."

"Can't stop? It will stop. As of tonight. I won't go in there and embarrass everybody by calling them out this minute. But I could."

"You have no right. You don't own the orchestra, and I'm paying them plenty."

"I don't doubt it. But I represent the network and we are paying them our version of plenty to deliver their best every night for six weeks during this series. At the moment they are taking our money under false pretenses."

"It won't be much longer."

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"Longer, hell! It should never have started." Letting himself go, Bracewell was beginning to enjoy the sensation of telling this rich egotist where to get off. He had solved the mystery of the bad concerts and now he was going to put things right. "Besides, that conductor in there, your husband. Is he a member of the union? I doubt it. They shouldn't even be playing under him. I'm surprised they agreed to do it."

Leonora noticed the disordered fireplace. She got up and took a brass-handled brush from a rack of implements and used it to sweep the hearth. "They are doing it partly for the money," she said. "What is it they say these days—an offer they could not refuse?" She replaced the brush and sat down. "But the main reason is they understand what is happening. And they sympathize."

Bracewell knew she had more to say. "Go ahead," he told her.

"The music is my husband's," she explained. "For years he has been composing one work after another. They have never been performed—it's almost impossible to get new orchestral works played. Anyway, he never tried very hard. His pleasure came from the composing and he always felt the day would come when he would arrange a performance."

"And this is the day?"

"Yes. It came too soon." She was editing a story she had told too often. "I'll spare you the grim details. My husband is dying, you must have seen that. There is no cure for his condition. The wasting process is accelerating—Dr. Obley predicts no more than two weeks before he won't be able to get out of bed. So you can see why we are hurrying."

Bracewell had never allowed sympathetic feelings to sway him from what he knew was the right course. "Mrs. Miles," he said, "I'm sorry about your husband. I'm sorry for what you both must be going through. But that does not give him a license to commandeer an orchestra which belongs to the people of this state."

"It wasn't his idea, it was mine. I saw the desolation he felt when Dr. Obley told him how little time was left. I was with him when it sank in—he would never hear his music performed. That was when I decided he *would* hear it. And that he would die knowing his music would survive in recordings by the best musicians available."

"This is your doing?"

"I organized the whole thing. I paid huge fees to everybody and I demanded secrecy till the project was over. And it was working.

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Your predecessor didn't know anything was happening. Then they appointed you." She showed him a ghost of the intimate smile that had charmed him earlier. "I knew you would pursue the mystery. You had to be shown."

"It's a sad story," Bracewell said. "Very noble and romantic, I suppose. But it changes nothing. My responsibility is to the public who attend and tune in these concerts. They're being short-changed and this con has to stop. Or I will stop it."

"Con? How can you say that? This is a fair and honest arrangement." She turned away. "I misjudged you, Mr. Bracewell. With your love of good music, I thought you had some humanity in you. But you're nothing but a rigid little bureaucrat."

Bracewell arose, overflowing with righteous anger. "It's because I love good music that I want to end this farce. You really turn me off with your money and your self-centered ideas, manipulating people, controlling the situation. Well, lady, you are in control no longer. This noise your husband calls music doesn't deserve to be played by students, let alone the Met. And having it recorded? It's a travesty. Just because you can afford to do something doesn't mean you always get to do it." Bracewell turned to the door. "Certainly not while I'm around."

She overtook him and faced him in the corridor. "Wait here," she said.

"Why?"

"You'll need transport back to the city. I can't leave my husband now. I'll find somebody to drive you in my car."

She saw his hesitation and her expression hardened. "You aren't going to go into the studio and kill the session? You said you'd let tonight go."

Bracewell made up his mind. "All right," he said. "Arrange my lift. But tonight is the end. No more indulging yourself with my orchestra."

She was gone only a minute or so, leaving the corridor by the control-room door and reappearing in the same way. A man followed her, short and stocky in a gray business suit, with a bald head and a florid complexion. At a distance he looked past middle age but the baldness was premature. Up close he appeared to be no more than 30. "This is Dr. Obley," Leonora said. "He stands by when Finley works, in case he breaks down."

"I don't want to take you away, Doctor," Bracewell said. "If you're needed here—"

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"It's okay. I gave Mr. Miles a shot earlier. He'll make it through the night."

As they walked through darkness across the gravel forecourt to where the car was parked beside the two buses, Bracewell looked back. The open doorway was a golden snapshot in the black frame of the house, with the tall silhouette of Leonora Miles centered in it, one hand on the edge of the door.

Bracewell climbed into the passenger seat and stretched his legs. He waited for Obley to open the other door. When he did not, Bracewell craned his neck and saw the doctor leaning into another car a few yards away. In a moment he approached carrying a black bag. As he opened the door and made a production of stowing the bag on the back seat, he said, "I never go anywhere without my kit. You never know when you may run into an emergency."

After some considerable fuss with the bag he got in behind the wheel and slammed the door. The only illumination now was moonlight through the windshield. "Better buckle up that safety belt," Obley said.

It was the over-the-shoulder type. Bracewell found the hasp, drew it tight, and buckled it. The doctor leaned across. "Make it real tight," he said. "Too loose is worse than nothing." He took hold of the belt and drew it so tight that Bracewell almost lost his breath and one of his arms was pinioned.

"Hey, easy—" he said.

"Just a minute," Obley said, busy at Bracewell's side, "your sleeve is caught."

Bracewell felt his cuff ride up, then a sharp sting under his wrist, somewhat prolonged. "What are you—?"

Obley drew away and moonlight flashed on the hypodermic needle. He opened the door on his side and stepped out of the car. Bracewell felt panic and rage rising in him. He struggled with the belt and managed to unfasten it. Already his left arm felt numb. He opened the door and stepped out and up into the night. Space seemed very wide around him and very dark. Where was Obley? He thought he glimpsed the doctor on the other side of the car and went after him. But the bald head disappeared and then appeared again beside one of the buses. Bracewell followed, almost reached the bus, then found his hands pressing gravel. He stared at the rough surface so close to his eyes.

Hands were on his shoulders. "You'll have to help me get him inside," Obley said.

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Bracewell did not see Leonora, but he heard her voice. "We'll put him in the room behind the studio. Can you help me keep him like this for a week? Will he live?"

"Oh, sure. He'll lose weight. Somebody will have to feed him. But he'll be okay."

During the days that followed, Bracewell lost track of time. He suffered hallucinations and could not be sure where they ended and reality took over. Each afternoon an emaciated man crept into the room and sat with him for what seemed hours, playing tape after tape at top volume. It was all the same hideous music Bracewell had heard on the night he arrived. His partly paralyzed face was able to register his disapproval.

"No, no," Finley Miles said in a voice as weak as a sick child's. "I'm trying to save your life. You must learn to appreciate my music. There are only a few days left. Then Leonora will either set you free or you will have to be—" Miles shook his head. "You can understand she will have no choice if she thinks you are going to the police. The only way out for you is if you can really and truly learn to love my music—and convince her you have done so. Then you will be able to agree with us that this whole business has been worthwhile."

Bracewell forced himself to concentrate. This was not a dream . . . Finley Miles was telling him the simple truth. If he was going to survive, he would have to face Leonora and she would not easily be fooled. He listened intently to the clanging, discordant sounds, trying to discover some musical justification for them. But inside his head, soaring up to overwhelm the noise in the room, he kept hearing the third movement of Dvorak's 8th, and Bracewell knew that these sublime themes were going to see him into Heaven.

"Q"

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Chief Inspector Wexford of Kingsmarkham is back—in one of those quiet English mysteries that give so much reading pleasure, and recall, if not the "olden age," the "golden age" of pure detective stories told in the classic manner.

This is both an old case and a new one. The Winchurch affair occurred in 1900, nearly eighty years ago, but its details and its doubts still linger in people's memory, still fascinate those who are interested in Notable British Trials. Florence Winchurch was hanged for the murder of her husband Edward. But was she truly guilty? Was an innocent woman sent to the gallows? If so, who really murdered Edward Winchurch?

Inspector Wexford, in an unusual way, re-investigates the evidence in an eighty-year-old crime . . .

INSPECTOR WEXFORD AND THE WINCHURCH AFFAIR

by *RUTH RENDELL*

"Matrimony," said Chief Inspector Wexford, "begins with dearly beloved and ends with amazement."

His wife, sitting beside him on the bridegroom's side of the church, whispered, "What did you say?"

He repeated it. She steadied the large floral hat which her husband had called becoming but not exactly conducive to *sotto voce* intimacies. "What on earth makes you say that?"

"Thomas Hardy. He said it first. But look in your Prayer Book."

The bridegroom waited, hang-dog, with his best man. Michael Burden—Inspector Michael Burden, Wexford's assistant—was very much in love, was entering this second marriage with someone ad-

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mirably suited to him, had agreed with his fiancée that nothing but a religious ceremony would do for them, yet at 44 was a little superannuated for what Wexford called "all this white wedding gubbins." There were 200 people in the church. Burden, his best man, and his ushers were in morning dress. Madonna lilies and stephanotis and syringa decorated the pews, the pulpit, and the chancel steps. It was the kind of thing that is properly designed for someone 20 years younger. Burden had been through it before when he *was* 20 years younger.

Wexford chuckled silently, looking at Burden's pale anxious face above the high white collar. But as Dora, leafing through the marriage service, said, "Oh, I *see*," the organist went from voluntaries into the opening bars of the Lohengrin march, and Jenny Ireland appeared at the church door on her father's arm.

A beautiful bride, of course. Seven years younger than Burden, blonde, gentle, low-voiced and given to radiant smiles. The Rector of St. Peter's began: "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together . . ."

While Burden and Miss Ireland were being informed that marriage was not for the satisfaction of their carnal instincts and that they must bring up their children in a Christian manner, Wexford quenched his boredom by studying the congregation. In front of himself and Dora sat Burden's sister-in-law Grace whom everyone had thought he would marry after the death of his first wife, her only sister. But Burden had found consolation with a red-headed woman, wild and sweet and strange, gone now God knew where, and Grace had married someone else. Two little boys now sat between Grace and that someone else, giving their parents a full-time job keeping them quiet.

Burden's parents were dead. Wexford thought he recognized, from one meeting a dozen years before, an aged aunt. Beside her sat Dr. Crocker and his wife, beyond them and behind were a crowd he knew either only by sight or not at all. Next to Wexford was his older daughter and her sons, a little senior to Grace's children, then Neil her husband, at the central aisle end his younger daughter, the actress, Sheila Wexford of the Royal Shakespeare Company, who on her entry had commanded nudges, whispers, every gaze.

"I, Michael George, take thee, Janina, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward . . ."

Janina. *Janina*? Wexford had supposed her name was Jennifer. What sort of parents called a daughter Janina? Fans of Dumas? He turned to have a good look at these philonomatous progenitors. They

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looked ordinary enough—Mr. Ireland, apparently exhausted from the effort of giving the bride away, Jenny's mother already making use of the lace handkerchief provided for the specific purpose of crying into it those tears of joy and loss. What romantic streak had led them to dismiss names like Elizabeth and Susan and Anne in favor of—Janina?

"Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. Forasmuch as Michael George and Janina have consented together in holy wedlock . . ."

Had they been as adventurous in the naming of their son? All Wexford could see of him was a broad back, a bit of profile, and now a hand. The hand was passing a large white handkerchief to his mother, her own being saturated. Wexford found himself suddenly yanked to his feet to sing a hymn.

"O, Perfect Love, all human thought transcending,
Lowly we kneel in prayer before Thy throne . . ."

These words had the effect of evoking from Mrs. Ireland audible sobs. Her son—hadn't Burden said he was in publishing?—looked embarrassed, turning his head. A young woman, strangely dressed in black with an orange hat, edged past the publisher to put a consoling arm round his mother.

"O Lord, save Thy servant and Thy handmaid."

"Who put their trust in Thee," said Dora and most of the rest of the congregation.

"O Lord, send them help from Thy holy place."

Wexford, to show team spirit, said, "Amen," and when everyone else said, "And evermore defend them," decided to keep quiet in the future.

Mrs. Ireland had stopped crying. Wexford's gaze drifted to his own daughters, Sheila singing lustily, Sylvia, the Women's Liberationist, with less assurance as if she doubted the ethics of lending her support to so archaic and sexist a ceremony.

"Almighty God, who at the beginning did create our first parents, Adam and Eve . . ."

Dear Mike, thought Wexford with the flash of sentimentality that came to him perhaps once every ten years, you'll be okay now. No more lusts conflicting with a puritan conscience, no more loneliness, no more worrying about those selfish kids of yours, no more temptation-of-St.-Anthony stuff.

"For after this manner in the old time the holy women who trusted in God . . ."

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He was quite surprised that they were using the ancient form. Still, the bride had promised to obey. He couldn't resist glancing at Sylvia.

". . . being in subjection to their own husbands . . ."

Her face was a study in incredulous dismay as she mouthed at Neil "unbelievable" and "antique."

"Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, whose daughters ye are as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement."

It was over. Wexford grinned at his wife. "There you are!" The principal players went off into the vestry.

At the Olive and Dove Hotel there was a reception line to greet guests, Mrs. Ireland smiling, re-rouged and restored, Burden looking like someone who has had an operation and been told the prognosis is excellent, Jenny smiling and serene as a bride should be.

Dry sherry and white wine on trays. No champagne.

Wexford remembered that there was a younger Ireland daughter, absent with her husband in some far-off place—Botswana? Lesotho? No doubt all the champagne funds had been expended on her. It was a buffet lunch, but a good one—smoked salmon and duck and strawberries. Nobody, he said to himself, has ever really thought of anything better to eat than smoked salmon and duck and strawberries unless it might be caviar and grouse and syllabub. He was weighing the two menus against one another, must without knowing it have been thinking aloud, for a voice said, "Asparagus, trout, apple pie."

"Well, maybe," said Wexford, "but I do like meat. Trout's a bit insipid. You're Jenny's brother. I'm sorry I don't remember your name. How d'you do?"

"How d'you do? I know who you are. Mike told me. I'm Amyas Ireland."

So that funny old pair hadn't had a single indulgence when they had named Janina. Wexford's face must have shown what he was thinking.

"Okay, I know," said Ireland. "But how about my other sister? She's called Cunegonde. Her husband calls her Queenie. Look, I'd like to talk to you. Could we get together a minute away from all this crush? Mike was going to help me out but I can't ask him now, not when he's off on his honeymoon. It's about a book we're publishing."

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The girl in black and orange, Burden's nephews, Sheila Wexford, Burden's best man, and a gaggle of children, all carrying plates, passed between them at this point. It was at least a minute before Wexford could ask, "Who's we?" and another half minute before Amyas Ireland understood what he meant.

"Carlyon Brent," he said, his mouth full of duck. "I work for Carlyon Brent."

One of the largest and most distinguished of publishing houses, and still independent. Wexford was impressed. "You published the Vandrian, didn't you, and the de Coverley books?"

Ireland nodded. "Mike said you were a great reader. That's good. Can I get you some more duck? No? I'm going to. I won't be a minute." Enviously Wexford watched him shovel fat-rimmed slices of duck breast onto his plate, take a brioche, have a second thought and take another. The man was thin as a rail too, positively emaciated. He sat down again and said, "I look after the crime list. As I said, Mike half promised . . . This isn't fiction, it's fact. It happened here in Kingsmarkham, although a long time ago. The Winchurch case?"

"Ah."

"I know it's a bit of a nerve asking, but would you read a manuscript for me?"

Wexford took a cup of coffee from a passing tray. "What for?"

"Well, in the interests of truth. Mike was going to tell me what he thought." Wexford looked at him dubiously. He had the highest respect and the deepest affection for Inspector Burden but he was one of the last people he would have considered as a literary critic. "To tell me if he thought it was accurate," the publisher said. "You see, it's worrying me. The author has discovered some new facts and they more or less prove Mrs. Winchurch's innocence." He hesitated. "Have you ever heard of a writer named Kenneth Gandolph?"

Wexford was saved from answering by the pounding of a gavel on the top table and the beginning of the speeches. A great many toasts had been drunk, several dozen telegrams read out, and the bride and groom had departed to change their clothes before he had an opportunity to reply to Ireland's question. And he was glad of the respite, for what he knew of Gandolph, though based on hearsay, was not flattering.

"Doesn't he write crime novels?" Wexford asked when the inquiry was repeated. "And the occasional examination of a real-life crime?"

Nodding, Ireland said, "It's good, this manuscript of his. We want

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to do it for next spring's list. It's about an eighty-year-old murder, sure, but people are still fascinated by it. I think this new version could cause quite a sensation."

"Florence Winchurch was hanged," said Wexford, "yet there was always some margin of doubt about her guilt. Where does Gandolph get his fresh facts from?"

"May I send you a copy of the typescript? You'll find all that in the introduction."

Wexford shrugged, then smiled. "I suppose so. You do realize I can't do more than maybe spot a mistake in forensics? I did say 'maybe,' mind." But his interest had already been caught. It made him say, "Florence was married here at St. Peter's, you know, and she also had her wedding reception here."

"And spent part of her honeymoon in Greece. It's all in Ken's book."

Burden and Jenny had come back into the room, he in a gray lounge suit, she in pale-blue sprigged muslin. Wexford felt an absurd impulse of tenderness toward his assistant. It was partly caused by Jenny's hat which she would never wear again, would never have occasion to wear, would remove the minute they got into the car. But Burden was the sort of man who could never be happy with a woman who didn't have a hat as part of her "going-away" costume. Burden's own suit was eminently unsuitable for flying to Crete in June. They both looked very happy and embarrassed.

Mrs. Ireland seized her daughter in a crushing embrace.

"It's not forever, Mother," said Jenny. "It's only for two weeks."

"Well, in a way," said Burden. He shook hands gravely with his own son, down from Reading University for the weekend, and planted a kiss on his daughter's forehead. Must have been reading novels, Wexford thought, grinning to himself.

"Good luck, Mike," he said.

The bride took his hand and put a soft cool kiss onto the corner of his mouth. Say I'm growing old but add, Jenny kissed me. He didn't say that aloud. He nodded and smiled and took his wife's arm and frowned at Sylvia's naughty boys like the patriarch he was. Burden and Jenny went out to the car which had *Just Married* written in lipstick on the rear window and a shoe tied on the back.

There was a clicking of handbag clasps, a flurry of hands, and then a tempest of confetti broke over them.

The house stood isolated, some 20 yards back from the Myfleet

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Road. Plumb in the center of its façade was a plaque bearing the date 1896. Wexford had often thought that there seemed to have been positive intent on the part of late-Victorian builders to design and erect houses that were not only ugly, complex, and inconvenient, but also distinctly sinister in appearance. The Limes, though well maintained and set in a garden as multicolored, cushiony, and floral as a quilt, nevertheless kept this sinister quality.

Without being able to define exactly how, Wexford could see that, in relation to the walls, the proportions of the sash windows were wrong. A turret grew out of each of the front corners, and each of these turrets was topped by a conical roof, giving the place the look of a cross between Balmoral Castle and a hotel in Kitzbühel. The lime trees which gave the house its name had been lopped so many times since their planting at the turn of the century that now they were squat and misshapen.

In the days of the Winchurches it had been called Paraleash House. But this name, of historical significance for its relation to the ancient manor of Paraleash, had been changed specifically on account of the murder of Edward Winchurch. Even so, the house had stood empty for ten years. Then it had found a buyer a year or so before the First World War, a man who was killed in that war. Its present owner had occupied it for half a dozen years, and in the time intervening between then and 1918 it had been variously a nursing home, the annex of an agricultural college, and a private school, before reverting to the purpose for which it had been built, a dwelling house. The owner was a retired brigadier. As he emerged from the front door with two sealyhams on a lead, Wexford retreated to his car and drove home.

It was Monday evening and Burden's marriage was two days old. Monday was also the evening of Dora's pottery class, the fruits of which, bruised-looking and not invariably symmetrical, were scattered haphazardly about the room like windfalls. Hunting along his bookshelves for F. Tennyson Jesse's *When the Summer is Shed* and *The Trial of Florence Winchurch* in the Notable British Trials Series, he nearly knocked over one of these rotund yet lopsided objects. With a sigh of relief that it was unharmed, he set about refreshing his memory with the help of Miss Jesse's classic.

Florence May Anstruther had been 19 at the time of her marriage to Edward Winchurch and he 47. She was a good-looking fair-haired girl, rather tall and Junoesque, the daughter of a Kingsmarkham chemist—that is, a pharmacist, for her father had kept a shop in

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the High Street. In 1895 this damned her as of no account in the social hierarchy, and few people would have bet much on her chances of marrying well. But she did.

Winchurch was a barrister who, at this stage of his life, practiced law more from inclination than need. His father, a Sussex landowner, had died some three years before and had left him what for the last decade of the Nineteenth Century was an enormous fortune—£200,000. Presumably, he had been attracted to Florence by her youth, her looks, and her ladylike ways. She had been given the best education, including six months at a finishing school, that the chemist could afford. Winchurch's attraction for Florence was generally supposed to have been solely his money.

They were married in June 1895 at the parish church of St. Peter's, Kingsmarkham, and went on a six-months' honeymoon, touring Italy, Greece, and the Swiss Alps. When they returned home, Winchurch took a lease of Sewingbury Priory while building began on Paraleash House, and it may have been that those conical roofs on those turrets were inspired directly by what Florence had seen on her Alpine travels. They moved into the new house, which was lavishly furnished, in May 1896, and Florence settled down to the life of a Victorian lady with a wealthy husband and a staff of indoor and outdoor servants—a vapid life at best, even if alleviated by a brood of children. But Florence was to have no children.

Once or twice a week Edward Winchurch went up to London by the train from Kingsmarkham as commuters had done before and have been doing ever since. Florence gave orders to her cook, arranged the flowers, paid and received calls, read novels, and devoted a good many hours a day to her face, her hair, and her dress. Local opinion of the couple at that time seemed to have been that they were as happy as most people, that Florence had done very well for herself and knew it, and Edward not so badly as had been predicted.

In the autumn of 1897 a young doctor of medicine bought a practice in Kingsmarkham and came to live there with his unmarried sister. Their name was Fenton. Frank Fenton was an extremely handsome man, 26 years old, six feet tall, with jet-black hair, a Byronic eye, and an arrogant lift to his chin. The sister was called Ada, and she was neither good-looking nor arrogant, being partly crippled by poliomyelitis which had left her with one leg badly wasted and paralyzed.

It was ostensibly to befriend Ada Fenton that Florence first began calling at the Fentons' house in the Queen Street. Florence pro-

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fessed great affection for Ada, took her about in her carriage, and offered her the use of it whenever she had to go any distance. From this it was an obvious step to persuade Edward that Frank Fenton should become the Winchurches' doctor. Within another few months young Mrs. Winchurch had become the doctor's mistress.

It was probable that Ada knew nothing, or next to nothing, about it. In the 1890's a young girl could be, and usually was, very innocent. At the trial it was stated by Florence's coachman that he would be sent to the Fentons' house several times a week to take Miss Fenton driving, while Ada's housemaid said that Mrs. Winchurch would arrive on foot soon after Miss Fenton had gone out and be admitted through a French door by the doctor himself.

During the winter of 1898 it seemed likely that Frank Fenton had performed an abortion on Florence Winchurch, and for some months afterward they met only at social gatherings and occasionally when Florence was visiting Ada. But their feelings for each other were too strong for them to bear separation and by the following summer they were again meeting at Fenton's house while Ada was out, and now also at Paraleash House on the days when Edward had departed for the law courts.

Divorce was difficult but by no means impossible or unheard-of in 1899. At the trial Frank Fenton said he wanted Mrs. Winchurch to ask her husband for a divorce. He would have married her in spite of the disastrous effect on his career. It was she, he said, who refused to consider it on the grounds that she did not think she could bear the fearful disgrace.

In January 1900 Florence went to London for the day and, among other purchases, bought at a grocer's two cans of herring fillets marinaded in a white wine sauce. It was rare for canned food to appear in the Winchurch household, and when Florence suggested that these herring fillets should be used in the preparation of a dish called *Filets de hareng marinés a la Rosette*, the recipe for which she had been given by Ada Fenton, the cook, Mrs. Eliza Holmes, protested that she could prepare it from fresh fish. Florence, however, insisted, one of the cans was used, and the dish was made and served to Florence and Edward at dinner. It was brought in by the parlormaid, Alice Evans, as a savory or final course to a four-course meal. Although Florence had shown so much enthusiasm about the dish, she took none of it. Edward ate a moderate amount and the rest was removed to the kitchen where it was shared among Mrs. Holmes, Alice Evans, and the housemaid, Violet Stedman. No one

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suffered any ill effects. The date was January 30th, 1900.

Five weeks later, on March 6th, Florence asked Mrs. Holmes to make the dish again, using the remaining can, as her husband had liked it so much. This time Florence too partook of the herring dish, but when the remains of it were about to be removed by Alice to the kitchen, Florence advised her to tell the others not to eat it as she "thought it had a strange taste and was perhaps not quite fresh." However, although Mrs. Holmes and Alice abstained, Violet Stedman ate a larger quantity than had either Florence or Edward.

Florence, as was her habit, left Edward to drink his port alone. Within a few minutes a strangled shout was heard from the dining room and a sound as of furniture breaking. Florence and Alice Evans and Mrs. Holmes went into the room and found Edward Winchurch lying on the floor, a chair with one leg wrenched from its socket tipped over beside him and an overturned glass of port on the table. Florence approached him and he went into a violent convulsion, arching his back and baring his teeth, his hands grasping the chair in apparent agony.

John Barstow, the coachman, was sent to fetch Dr. Fenton. By this time Florence was complaining of stomach pains and seemed unable to stand. Fenton arrived, had Edward and Florence removed upstairs, and asked Mrs. Holmes what they had eaten. She showed him the empty herring-fillets can, and he recognized the brand as that by which a patient of a colleague of his had recently been infected with botulism, a virulent and usually fatal form of food poisoning. Fenton immediately assumed that it was *bacillus botulinus* which had attacked the Winchurches, and such is the power of suggestion that Violet Stedman now said she felt sick and faint.

Botulism causes paralysis, difficulty in breathing, and a disturbance of the vision. Florence appeared to be partly paralyzed and said she had double vision. Edward's symptoms were different. He continued to have spasms, was totally relaxed between spasms, and although he had difficulty in breathing and other symptoms of botulism, the onset had been exceptionally rapid for any form of food poisoning. Fenton, however, had never seen a case of botulism, and he supposed that the symptoms would vary greatly from person to person. He gave jalap and cream of tartar as a purgative and, in the absence of any known relatives of Edward Winchurch, he sent for Florence's father, Thomas Anstruther.

Edward's condition was steadily worsening, but Frank Fenton continued to insist that his illness and Florence's were due to bot-

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ulism. If he was less innocent than was supposed, he had made a mistake in sending for Anstruther, for Florence's father insisted on a second opinion, and at ten o'clock went himself to the home of that very colleague of Fenton's who had recently witnessed a known case of botulism. This was Dr. Maurice Waterfield, twice Fenton's age, a popular man with a large practice in Stowerton. He looked at Edward Winchurch, at the agonized grin which overspread his features, and as Edward went into his last convulsive seizure, pronounced that he had been poisoned not by *bacillus botulinus* but by strychnine.

Edward died a few minutes afterward. Dr. Waterfield told Fenton that there was nothing physically wrong with either Florence or Violet Stedman. The former was suffering from shock or "neurasthenia," the latter from indigestion brought on by overeating. The police were informed, an inquest took place, and after it Florence was immediately arrested and charged with murdering her husband by administering to him a noxious substance, to wit *strychnos nux vomica*, in a decanter of port wine.

Florence's trial took place in London at the Central Criminal Court. She was 24 years old, a beautiful woman, and was by now known to have been having a love affair with the young and handsome Dr. Fenton. As such, she and her case attracted national attention. Fenton had by then lost his practice, lost all hope of succeeding with another in the British Isles, and even before the trial his name had become a byword, and scurrilous doggerel was being sung about him and Florence in the music halls. But far from increasing his loyalty to Florence, this seemed to make him the more determined to dissociate himself from her. He appeared as the prosecution's principal witness, and it was his evidence which sent Florence to the gallows.

Fenton admitted his relationship with Florence but said that he had told her it must end. The only possible alternative was divorce and ultimately marriage to himself. In early January 1900 Florence had been calling on his sister Ada, and he had come in to find them looking through a book of recipes. One of the recipes called for the use of herring fillets marinaded in white wine sauce, the mention of which had caused him to tell them about a case of botulism which a patient of Dr. Waterfield's was believed to have contracted from eating the contents of a can of just such fillets. He had named the brand and advised his sister not to buy any of that kind.

When, some six or seven weeks later, he was called to the dying

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Edward Winchurch, the cook had shown him an empty can of that very brand. In his opinion, Mrs. Winchurch herself was not ill at all, was not even ill from "nerves" but was shamming. The judge said that he was not there to give his opinion, but the warning came too late. The point had already been made to the jury.

Asked if he was aware that strychnine had therapeutic uses in small quantities, Fenton said he was but that he kept none in his dispensary. In any case, his dispensary was kept locked and the cupboards inside it were also locked, so it would have been impossible for Florence to have entered the room or to have appropriated anything while on a visit to Ada. Ada Fenton was not called as a witness. She was ill, suffering from what her doctor, Dr. Waterfield, called "brain fever."

The prosecution's case was that, in order to inherit Edward's fortune and marry Dr. Fenton, Florence Winchurch had attempted to poison her husband with infected fish, or fish she had good reason to suppose might be infected. When this failed she saw to it that the dish was provided again, and herself added strychnine to the port decanter. It was postulated that she obtained the strychnine from her father's pharmacy, without his knowledge, where it was kept in stock for the destruction of rats and moles. After her husband was taken ill, she herself simulated symptoms of botulism in the hope that the convulsions of strychnine poisoning would be confused with the paralysis and impeded breathing caused by the bacillus.

The defense tried to shift the blame to Frank Fenton, at least to suggest a conspiracy between him and Florence, but it was no use. The jury were out for 40 minutes. They pronounced her guilty, the judge sentenced her to death, and she was hanged 23 days later.

After the execution Frank and Ada Fenton emigrated to the United States and settled in New England. Fenton's reputation had gone before him. He was never again able to practice as a doctor but worked as a traveling salesman for a firm of pharmaceutical manufacturers until his death in 1932. He never married. Ada, on the other hand, surprisingly enough, did. Ephraim Hurst fell in love with her in spite of her sickly constitution and withered leg. They were married in the summer of 1902 and by the spring of 1903 Ada Hurst was dead in childbirth.

By then Paraleash House had been renamed The Limes and lime trees planted to help conceal its forbidding yet fascinating façade from the curious passer-by . . .

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a *NEW* Photographer story by

JAMES HOLDING

Manuel Andradas, The Photographer, had two loves: his profession, photography, and his—what shall we call it? avocation? hobby?—no, it was his other profession. He was a killer for hire, but with his fastidiousness of language, his delicacy of expression, he preferred to call himself a Nullifier. And he was at all times a businessman . . .

IN THE PRESENCE OF DEATH

by *JAMES HOLDING*

The name Rodolfo wrote on the card was Ernesto Montoro. He added the address underneath the penciled name, returned his pencil to his pocket, and slid the card across the table to The Photographer. "A nonentity," Rodolfo said.

Manuel Andradas picked up the card and studied it briefly before tearing it into shreds and carefully depositing the shreds in his jacket pocket. "We are all nonentities," he murmured sententiously, "in the presence of death." He regarded Rodolfo without enthusiasm. Lank hair, dark oily skin, prognathous jaw, long thin lips; for the tenth time Manuel thought to himself that Rodolfo looked very much like an ape. And Manuel had never met an ape that appealed to him. Still, Rodolfo was The Photographer's only link with The Big Ones, his periodic employers, so he must be suffered as patiently as possible.

Manuel said, lifting his tiny coffee cup to drain it, "By branding him a nonentity, I presume you are trying to beat me down in price?"

"Not at all." Rodolfo's eyes went watchfully about the small café on Avenida Rio Branca where they had met. "As always, we are being as generous as our own fee allows."

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"How much?" Manuel asked.

"One hundred thousand."

Manuel was silent. His muddy eyes mirrored contempt. In his 35 years of life The Photographer had never been able to make up his mind with any certainty which he loved better: money or photography. At this moment, however, money gained the ascendancy over art. He said sullenly, "I spend that much in a single year on film alone."

"Indeed? Then you will be glad to earn another year's supply so easily."

After another period of silence Manuel said at last, "Very well." His lips pursed in distaste. "Allow me to point out, however, that you have paid me twice that amount to nullify a child. Is a nonentity worth less than a child?"

"Sometimes," answered Rodolfo. He finished his coffee and stood up. "Half in advance as usual. The rest when you present proof."

Manuel stood up with him. "Any deadline?"

"As quickly as possible—by special request of my superiors."

"*Va bem.*"

When they shook hands at parting, Rodolfo left in Manuel's palm a fat roll of new banknotes.

Manuel Andradas knew the streets, parks, and beaches of Rio de Janeiro as well as he knew the stops on his own cameras. Thus, twenty minutes after leaving Rodolfo, he was strolling casually along Rua do Tesouro—a byway not far from Praça Tiradentes—toward the address he had committed to memory from Rodolfo's card.

While still half a block away, he could see the name of the man he sought blazoned across a narrow shop front: *Ernesto Montoro, Printer*.

So, thought Manuel, a printer. He walked casually past the shop, stealing a quick side-glance through the plate-glass entrance door. This brief glimpse showed him a shallow reception room, divided from what was no doubt the pressroom at the rear by a wooden partition on which were displayed samples of the establishment's work. The partition had a door in it and a desk set at right angles to it. Manuel made out the figure of a man seated at the desk.

Ernesto Montoro himself? Perhaps, thought Manuel. Rodolfo's use of the term "nonentity" somehow conjured up a tiny one-man operation. Yet in Manuel's line of work one could not afford to be

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careless about identification. Mistakes were irretrievable. So he walked along Rua do Tesouro until he overtook a small boy carrying a parrot-kite.

He accosted the lad. "Perhaps you can help me, small one? Are you of this neighborhood?"

The boy nodded. "*Sim*, Senhor."

"I seek the printing shop of Ernesto Montoro," said Manuel. "You know it?"

"You've passed it," the boy said, pointing back the way Manuel had come. "It's back there."

"Ah," said Manuel, a little shame-faced, "I was wool-gathering, I guess. On this side of the street?"

"Yes, Senhor." The boy shuffled his feet, anxious to be off to his kite-flying. "The name is over the door."

"A small establishment, then, I take it? I am sure I would have noticed a big one."

"Small, yes," said the boy impatiently. "Two men only. Senhor Montoro and his helper, the one with the big mustache. Senhor Montoro lives above his shop."

"Thank you," said Manuel politely. He turned back. The boy continued onward and soon rounded a corner out of sight.

Manuel retraced his steps, walking past the printing shop again. This time he thought he could hear through the plate-glass door the faint thud and clatter of a printing press in operation. And he obtained a better view of the man behind the desk in the reception room—a bald, middle-aged fellow with no sign of a big mustache. Senhor Montoro, then, beyond a doubt.

Circling the block, Manuel discovered a narrow service alley that obviously gave access to the rear door of the printing shop and its neighbors. The alley was deserted from end to end and deeply shaded. Manuel walked quietly along its cobblestones until he heard the sounds of the printing press once more, louder now, racketing into the alley through Montoro's wide-open delivery door.

The Photographer groped in his case, brought out his camera and a roll of film, and as he approached the open door became busily engaged in loading the film into the camera—the innocent photographer seeking a shadowed spot in which to reload his camera with sensitive film. As though by chance he stopped abreast the open door of Montoro's pressroom. And as he stopped, so also did the sound of the printing press within.

In the ensuing silence he heard someone whistling. He risked a

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glance through the door. Inside he saw the corner of a modern high-speed printing press, and beside the press, a slender young man in the act of removing a stained apron from his person and replacing it with a jacket he took from a hook on the wall. The young man sported a truly magnificent black mustache. Tossing his apron onto the now-silent press, he walked, still whistling, toward the door that led to the reception room at the front of the shop.

Manuel stepped through the open door and crouched down to put the bulk of the printing press between himself and the retreating printer. Then he sent his eyes urgently about the pressroom.

They passed rapidly over the presses, the plate racks, the rolls and cartons of paper stock, the containers of ink, and fastened with satisfaction on an enclosed stairway that rose from the rear corner of the room to the floor above. The stairway, he concluded, should mount to the living quarters of Ernesto Montoro above the printing shop. He had seen no sign of such an entrance on Rua do Tesouro.

He was silently ascending the first step of that staircase with the intention of concealing himself in Montoro's living quarters, when voices from the reception room arrested him. Evidently the young printer had left the door in the partition open.

"Where are *you* going?" demanded a gravelly baritone. Manuel decided it was Montoro's voice, since the young printer's whistling continued uninterrupted.

After a long moment the whistling ceased. "I'm going home," said the tenor of the mustachioed young man. "I've got a date."

"You're leaving an hour and a half before closing time?"

"Why not? I've finished the Baptista brochure. Three thousand copies, as specified. And anyway"—there was raw insolence in the young man's voice—"who's going to stop me?"

"I am, by God!" said Montoro harshly. "As the proprietor of this shop and your employer, I demand that you at least try to earn the money I pay you. There is still plenty of time to run off those wedding invitations today."

"Run them off yourself, then. I told you, I have a date. Which reminds me. She is a very expensive girl, and a very extravagant one as well, so I shall need more money."

"No! Our agreement stands!"

"What agreement, old man?" The young printer's words dropped like ice pellets, freezing Montoro's protest. "There is no *agreement* between us. There are only the demands I choose to make, and your acceptance of them. I thought that was understood."

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Montoro said slowly and intensely, "No man likes to be bled, Fernando. I think I am a reasonable man. I have demonstrated that. But recently you have gone too far." His voice rose. "And you will come to regret it, I promise you, as surely as your name is Fernando Lesse! And very soon!"

"Mercy," said Fernando mockingly, "you are frightening me, Senhor. I tremble, do you see? All the same, put an extra five hundred in my pay envelope this month if you know what is good for you. And furthermore, get that insulation renewed on the press cable, do you hear? It's dangerous the way it is."

Montoro mumbled something which Manuel did not hear, for he was already running swiftly down the service alley behind the printing shop. He rounded the corner onto Rua do Tesouro just in time to see Fernando of the mighty mustache emerge from Montoro's front entrance and make off at a leisurely, arrogant amble in the direction of Avenida Presidente Vargas.

Manuel followed him.

Thus it happened that Fernando Lesse in his small room across from the flower market on Rua do Ouvidor was suddenly awakened at three o'clock the next morning by a hand covering his mouth and a flashlight beam in his eyes.

From the impenetrable darkness behind the flashlight a strange voice said, "Awake. I cannot in honor kill a sleeping man."

Fernando, coming quickly awake, gasped, choked, and turned his head violently under Manuel's muffling hand. His mammoth mustache tickled The Photographer's hand.

After a moment Manuel removed his hand from Fernando's lips. It moved out of the light beam only to reappear at once holding a vicious-looking automatic pistol. The pistol was aimed directly between Fernando's eyes.

Fernando managed to stammer senselessly, ". . . you . . . what . . . *kill me*?"

"I have been hired to nullify you, Senhor."

"But—but—" Fernando began.

Manuel silenced him with a minute movement of the pistol. "Listen to me," he said. "You are Fernando Lesse, are you not?"

A mute nod.

"So. You are to die."

"Why?" Fernando whispered.

"How should I know? Someone wants you dead, that's all."

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"Who wants me dead?" The words came out a croak. "Who sent you?"

"The Big Ones. The Corporation. You have heard of them?"

Another nod.

"Well, we are accommodating a client in this matter," Manuel explained.

"What client, for God's sake?"

"Who wishes you dead, Senhor Lesse? Enough to pay one hundred thousand cruzeiros to arrange it?"

"Ernesto Montoro?" Fernando whispered.

In the darkness Manuel shrugged. "Perhaps. Have you done anything to this Montoro that would make him wish you dead?"

"Nothing! I swear it! He is my respected employer whom I serve faithfully."

Manuel said acidly, "That, no doubt, is why his name springs to your mind immediately?"

Fernando was trembling with fear. "I lied," he confessed. "Senhor Montoro could *wish* me dead. I admit it." He tried to sit up in bed. Manuel's pistol forced him gently flat again.

"Why?" Manuel asked.

"I . . . I . . . know something very . . . very prejudicial against him." Fernando swallowed dryly. "A secret that he does not wish made public, you understand?"

"Ah," said Manuel, accepting this explanation at once. "Blackmail, is that it? You are blackmailing Senhor Montoro?"

"Yes," said Fernando miserably. He closed his eyes against the dazzle of the flashlight.

The Photographer said, as though merely curious, "Has your blackmail been successful, then?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"Three years."

Three years! Manuel felt his spirits lift, as they always did at the faint smell of easy money. Three years of pay envelopes stuffed with blackmail money in addition to Fernando's regular salary! How many thousands of cruzeiros? Perhaps . . . He made a small gesture with the gun toward Fernando's face. "What guilty secret of Senhor Montoro's do you possess?" he inquired almost cheerfully.

Fernando said, "I went back to the shop unexpectedly one Friday night. It was very late, but I had forgotten my sunglasses which I would need at the beach the next day. When I let myself into the

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pressroom with my key, I was amazed to find all the lights on, and Senhor Montoro himself running one of the presses at full blast. After midnight! I thought he might be working overtime to meet a delivery deadline for a customer, perhaps. But when I saw what he was printing, I realized that he was engaged on a very private press-run of his own."

"What was he printing?"

"Money," said Fernando. "Cruzeiro notes in large denominations."

The Photographer grinned in the dark. "Well, well," he said. "Your employer is a counterfeiter?"

"He is."

"And when you found it out that Friday night you threatened him with exposure?"

"Unless he paid for my silence, yes."

"He has been paying for your silence ever since?"

"Yes."

"Small wonder, then, that he wishes you removed." Manuel sighed. He remembered Ernesto Montoro's furious warning to this young man the previous afternoon: "You will come to regret it, I promise you, as surely as your name is Fernando Lesse! And very soon!"

The charade began to make sense to Manuel.

He leaned forward and pushed his pistol against Fernando's forehead. "So all is explained," he said. "And now to work." The pressure of his index finger on the trigger of the pistol made his knuckle show up white in the flashlight beam.

"Wait! Wait!" It was a plea. "Do not shoot! I will pay you well to spare me!"

Manuel withdrew the pistol an inch. "How much?" he asked.

"As much as Montoro offered you. One hundred thousand."

"You? A printer's devil?" Manuel laughed harshly. "Where would you find such a sum?"

"My blackmail money. I have not spent it. I have been saving it for a nest egg to retire on."

The pistol withdrew another inch from Fernando's forehead. "This nest egg of yours is not composed of Senhor Montoro's counterfeit bills, I trust?"

"No! No!" Fernando's denial came more boldly as a small seed of hope began to germinate in his heart.

"Is the money handy?" Manuel asked.

"In this room! Under this very bed!"

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Manuel sat in the darkness without movement or word for a full minute. Finally he said, "You tempt me, Senhor. What if I agree?"

"Could you not transfer your—ah—attentions to my employer? Would The Big Ones need to know?"

"No, they have been paid in advance. As have I." The Photographer smiled grimly. "I daresay Ernesto Montoro would never be missed. He is, after all, a nonentity."

Fernando moved impatiently on the bed. "Is it a bargain, then? Will you do it?"

The flashlight beam didn't budge from the mustachioed face. "The money is under your bed?"

"Yes!" Fernando sensed victory. His words tumbled out. "Under my bed there is a loose board. Lift the board and the money is there!"

"Are you *sure* it is genuine money?"

"I am a printer," answered Fernando with a note of pride in his voice. "As such, I am a student of offset lithography, the process by which my employer duplicates genuine banknotes. I am, you might say, an expert."

Manuel rested the flashlight on his lap and with the hand thus freed, withdrew from his pocket the roll of bills Rodolfo had given him as down payment on Montoro's nullification. He stripped a thousand-cruzeiro note from the roll and held it toward Fernando. "As an expert," he said, "kindly tell me if this bill is genuine."

Fernando sat up, took the bill in his hand, examined it carefully in the bright light of Manuel's flash. Then he looked toward the dark shape behind the flashlight and said quietly, "It is counterfeit, Senhor."

Manuel nodded and returned the bill to his pocket.

Then, before he knelt and retrieved Fernando's nest egg from its hiding place under the bed, he expertly knocked Fernando unconscious with a blow of his gun butt.

The following evening he met Rodolfo by appointment at the open air cafe on Corcovado directly beneath the enormous statue of Christ. They selected an isolated table. Manuel settled his camera case at his feet. Neither said a word until the pert waitress had supplied them with *cafezinho* and left them alone.

Then Rodolfo murmured, "Well, Photographer?"

Under cover of the tabletop Manuel passed a five-by-seven photograph to Rodolfo, who studied the photograph with interest. As

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was to be expected of the man who had made *Rio Illustrated* famous throughout Brazil, Manuel's photograph was sharp and clear in every detail. It showed the convulsed body of Ernesto Montoro huddled on the floor beside a printing press, his face, turned toward the camera, contorted in the rictus of death.

"Electrocuted," The Photographer said, leaning across the table and pointing to a heavy electric cable in the picture. "The insulation was faulty, just there, do you see? And Senhor Montoro was careless."

"Excellent," Rodolfo commended. "Quite original. Our client will be pleased."

Manuel shook his head. "Not so, Rodolfo. For unless I am mistaken that is your client in the picture."

Rodolfo stared. "Are you mad? You were to nullify Senhor Ernesto Montoro of the address I gave you. Are you telling me this is not he? Have you killed the wrong man?"

"That is Montoro, all right. But I am inclined to believe he is also your client. God knows who he engaged The Big Ones to nullify. Certainly not himself. Yet there he lies, a witness to my loyalty to you, Rodolfo. I followed your orders, as always."

"What in God's name are you babbling about?"

Manuel said, "It is my belief that your principals, without your knowledge, have played a little joke on Senhor Montoro."

"A joke!" Rodolfo was incredulous. "The Big Ones do not play jokes, Photographer."

Manuel shrugged. "Then why," he asked reasonably, "did you pay me my fee yesterday in counterfeit money?"

"Counterfeit money!" Rodolfo, for the first time in Manuel's memory, was truly indignant.

"Every cruzeiro of it. Whether you knew it or not. And I am charitable enough to think you did not."

"Thank you," said Rodolfo ironically. "And how did *you* detect it, may I ask?"

"Rodolfo," said Manuel in a patronizing tone calculated to enrage Rodolfo still further, "you must remember that I am a photographer. The best in Brazil, as is generally conceded. I can be deceived, therefore, by *nothing* that involves photography, do you understand?"

"I do not. But I am sure you are about to explain."

"Listen. When I left you yesterday, I counted the money you had given me. And a single glance at those banknotes was enough to inform me that they were counterfeit. Clever, but slightly imperfect

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reproductions of genuine banknotes, and produced by a printing process that involves photography. Offset lithography, it is called."

"I never heard of it," said Rodolfo.

"Nevertheless. The printing process involves photography, as I say. And thus, it falls within my field of expertise. In this process, Rodolfo, genuine banknotes are exposed to chemically pre-sensitized plates, as simply as taking a snapshot. And then one mounts the plates on a high-speed modern printing press and turns out bills that are splendidly spendable but counterfeit. To be distinguished from genuine bills only by an expert like me, or a banker, or another printer."

"I don't believe it," said Rodolfo without much conviction.

The Photographer dipped into his pocket and held out a roll of bills to Rodolfo. "Here," he said, "is the money you gave me yesterday. Take it and show it to any expert you choose. You will learn it is counterfeit. Just as I suspect your superiors discovered when Ernesto Montoro paid it in to The Big Ones."

Rodolfo, understandably confused, said, "You are telling me that my superiors *knew* these were counterfeit bills when they gave them to me to pay you with?"

"That is what I believe. Yes. And thus, the little joke. The Big Ones, one suspects, are nobody's fools. When they are paid for a service with counterfeit bills, they render a counterfeit service. To them it seemed only just, I daresay, as well as amusing, to punish Ernesto Montoro for his effrontery by purchasing his own death with the very counterfeit money he had given them. Do you see?"

"Why would Montoro have been so foolish as to tender counterfeit money to The Big Ones?"

"Because it was all he had, perhaps," suggested Manuel. "He was a poor printer, remember. A nonentity, as you said yourself. Perhaps business was bad, or there was some unknown or unexpected drain on his resources." Manuel repressed a smile. "He must surely have acted out of desperation, hoping his deception would not be discovered by The Big Ones. After all, his banknotes are very, very good counterfeits. They could easily have escaped detection."

"You say *his* counterfeit banknotes. How do you conclude they were his?"

"In the course of my preparations to carry out my assignment yesterday, I had occasion to investigate Montoro's pressroom, Rodolfo. And I found there indisputable evidence that he was a counterfeiter—offset lithography plates of cruzeiro banknotes which

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no honest printer would possess, unless he was printing counterfeit money."

"The counterfeiter may not have been Montoro himself. Any employee with access to the printing equipment could do it."

"A good point. It also occurred to me. Montoro had only one employee, a fellow named Fernando Lesse. If he were the counterfeiter, I cannot conceive of him trying to buy his employer's death. Why should he endanger his access to the very facilities he needed for his counterfeiting by having their owner murdered?"

"Perhaps Montoro tumbled to Lesse's counterfeiting?"

"I suggest it was just the reverse. That Lesse caught out Montoro, and perhaps blackmailed him. So Montoro contracts with you to have Lesse removed."

"You're merely guessing," said Rodolfo.

"True. There is, however, one way to settle the matter."

"How?"

"Ask your superiors if they have ever heard the name Fernando Lesse."

"Well," said Rodolfo, hesitating.

"I enjoy a joke as much as anyone," said Manuel, "but not when it involves one hundred thousand cruzeiros that I have honestly earned. Therefore, will you at least show your principals that photograph to convince them that I have carried out my assignment faithfully? And urge them to give me the balance of my fee in genuine money. Will you do that?"

"What about those?" Rodolfo gestured toward the roll of counterfeit bills Manuel still held in his hand. "If they are, as you claim, truly counterfeit—"

"I am willing to meet The Big Ones halfway," said Manuel generously. "I'll accept one-half of my fee in counterfeit money if the other half is genuine. Principally, I wish The Big Ones to realize they have underestimated me. That I am not a complete fool. That I am worth far more than the niggling sums they pay me for my services. That I am a loyal instrument of their will. That I am even willing to go along with their joke on Montoro—halfway, at least. Although I consider it in very poor taste."

Rodolfo was smiling his hateful smile now. "I suppose I shall do as you ask, if only to show The Big Ones that *I* can go along with a joke, too." He finished his coffee. "I will have their answer and your money for you, if all goes well, by tomorrow night." He eyed Manuel with the wary eyes of a man who thinks he is being ma-

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nipulated but hopes it is not so.

"If they decide to pay the rest of my fee in genuine money," Manuel said, "perhaps they will welcome a suggestion as to how they may profitably dispose of the counterfeit money still in their possession."

"Oh?" said Rodolfo. "You have such a suggestion?"

"They can do what I intend to do with my fifty-thousand counterfeit cruzeiros. Purchase North American dollars from one of our large travel agencies, then exchange the dollars immediately for genuine cruzeiros at one of our good honest banks. You will be surprised at how profitable such a transaction can sometimes be."

"On the contrary," said Rodolfo, rising to leave, "I am no longer surprised at *anything* you say or do, Photographer. Good night." He waved a hand and departed, long arms swinging, bandy legs hurrying. More like an ape than ever, thought Manuel, watching him go.

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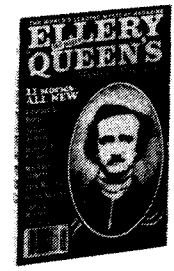

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"Q"

"The story I'm going to tell you is God's truth" . . .

MILLION-TO-ONE SHOT

by BILL PRONZINI and BARRY N. MALZBERG

When the old man turned the corner in front of his grandson's house he let out the breath he had been holding: Jack's car was still parked in the driveway. He pulled his station wagon to a stop at the curb, got out, hurried up to the door, put the heel of his hand against the doorbell button, and left it there, listening to the steady hollow ringing inside.

It was close to a minute before the latch clicked and the door was yanked open. There was anger on Jack's lean young face, but it gave way immediately to surprise and then to a grim frown.

"Grandad," he said. "What are you doing here?"

The old man locked gazes with him, and what he saw in his grandson's eyes told him all he needed to know. He had seen it before, that look of smoldering hatred and cold deadly determination—a long time ago in a bedroom mirror, reflected back to him from his own eyes—and its meaning was unmistakable.

"Invite me in, boy. I want to talk to you."

"Look, grandad, can't it wait? I was just on my way out. I've got something to take care of—"

"Yes, I expect you do," the old man said. "Your mother just called me. She told me all about Ed Turner embezzling money from your firm, the probable bankruptcy. She's afraid you're planning some kind of foolish revenge."

Jack said thinly, "What I do about this mess is my business."

"Is it? Well, maybe so. But we're going to have a talk first. Now step aside and let me in. I'm not leaving until you hear me out."

Hesitation. Then, with reluctance, Jack let go of the door and backed away inside. The old man entered, pushed the door shut, and moved up to within two paces of his grandson.

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He said, "You intend to kill him, don't you."

It wasn't a question; it was an accusation. Jack's eyes flicked aside. He didn't say anything.

"I know you, boy," the old man said. "I know how you think. You've probably got a clever plan all worked out—make it look like an accident, maybe, or a suicide. You don't figure you'll be caught. Maybe you even think it would take a million-to-one shot to keep you from getting away with it."

His grandson turned abruptly, went over to a chair, and sat on its padded arm. He stared straight ahead, not moving.

"Oh, I know you, all right," the old man said. "You're headstrong and hard-nosed—just like I was at your age. More like I was than you can imagine."

"Meaning what, grandad?"

"Meaning that history repeats itself sometimes, at least in this family. Meaning that when I wasn't much older than you I planned to murder a man too, and for some of the same reasons."

Jack's head snapped around; his mouth came open.

"That's right," the old man said. "And I figured to get away with it, same as you."

"*You* killed a man?" Jack said in disbelief.

"No. I was lucky, I didn't go through with it. Because of something that happened at a baseball game; because of a million-to-one shot."

He had his grandson's attention now. Jack was sitting forward, hands on his knees; he seemed a little bewildered.

"The story I'm going to tell you is God's truth," the old man said. "I swear that to you. It's God's truth . . ."

It happened during the early years of the Big Depression (he went on), just before repeal of Mr. Volstead's "noble experiment." People always talk about how bad it was when the stock market crashed in '29, but the worst years were the early thirties; that was when fortunes and lifestyles really began to self-destruct. And mine was one of them.

You already know part of the story—it's family history. The $10,000 my father left me when he died in 1925, from the sale of part of his farmland back in Indiana. How I turned the money over to a broker in Chicago and how he invested it for me in the stock market and built it up to a paper worth of $75,000 by 1929. How I lost it all in the crash, like thousands of others, and had to start all over again from scratch.

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But you don't know the whole story, the details.

My broker in Chicago was a man named Winfield. He was a high-powered type who worked out of a suite of offices in the Loop and who had a reputation for being particularly good on heavily margined stocks. He was also a baseball fan, one of the rabid ones, but I'll get to that part of it later.

I never met Winfield face to face. An attorney in Indianapolis had given me his name and I dealt with Winfield by phone and through bank drafts. I trusted him completely from the first; there was no reason why I shouldn't. He tripled my inheritance in the first year and a half, at least on paper, and after that I gave him *carte blanche*. I was gullible in those days and I didn't have much of a business sense; it never occurred to me that the bottom could drop out of the market, or that Winfield ought to have been taking steps to protect me against just that kind of collapse. I guess I had visions of being a millionaire some day, the way my assets kept escalating those four years.

When the crash came in October of '29 I was as worried as everybody else—everybody except Winfield, that is. "The worst thing we can do is give in to the panic and start selling," he told me when I phoned him in Chicago. "The crisis is severe right now but I think the market will recover before long. What we'll do is to go in on heavy margin, use the leverage. After things turn around you'll be worth two hundred thousand or better."

Well, I believed him and I let him have his way. What he did was to up me on the grain stocks, because he said grains were going to break through once Prohibition was repealed. But Repeal didn't happen as fast as a lot of folks expected, and by the end of 1930 I was margined to the hilt. "Don't worry," Winfield said then. "As soon as Hoover puts through his reforms we'll be circling the bases and heading home." He talked that way, used a lot of baseball clichés.

And I believed him again.

Only then all the big companies started their margin calls. Eighteen months later they had called in everything, all the certificates there were, and I knew for sure then—far too late—that I was wiped out. Winfield knew it sooner than I did, of course, but he never gave me any indication. None at all. Not an inkling.

The last time I talked to him he said it was too bad things had worked out that way but *he* wasn't personally liable for whatever happened in the market. He was just a broker; I was just one cus-

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tomer out of thousands. And if I didn't have any more lumber to bring up to the plate, why then I had to expect to lose the game.

After that he wouldn't take my phone calls and he wouldn't answer my letters. As far as he was concerned, I just didn't exist any more.

That summer the local bank foreclosed on my second mortgage and I lost the farm.

I had built up a savage hatred for Winfield by then. He had destroyed my life, or so I thought at the time—lied to me, broken my trust, reduced me to poverty. And was he paying for it in any way? No. College graduates were selling apples on street corners and bankrupt stockbrokers were throwing themselves out of tall office windows; but Winfield wasn't one of them. He was still riding high, as I found out that fall when I picked up a discarded Chicago newspaper. One of those high-handed opportunists who used others to make money on the Depression. He hadn't suffered one bit.

That was when I decided to kill him.

He had destroyed my life; I would destroy his. Biblical justice—an eye for an eye. You know what I mean and how I felt, don't you, Jack? You know what it's like to want revenge so badly you can't think about anything else.

Yes. You know.

So I managed to scrape together a little money and I boarded a train for Chicago. All during the trip I considered ways to kill him without getting caught, but when I arrived I still didn't have a firm plan. I took a room in the cheapest hotel I could find—I had less than ten dollars to my name after I paid for it—and then I went to the Loop building where Winfield had his offices. I had never met the man, as I said, but I had seen a photograph of him in that Chicago paper; I knew what he looked like.

I didn't see him that first day, but I came back the next and finally spotted him in the lobby around noon. A fat jovial-looking fellow dressed in an expensive suit, with such an air of prosperity about him that it made my blood boil. He went across to a tobacco stand and bought half a dozen fifty-cent cigars in glass tubes. I followed and got close enough to overhear his conversation with the clerk.

What they were talking about was baseball. The clerk asked Winfield if he was going to attend the big game at Wrigley Field the next afternoon, and Winfield said he was, he wouldn't miss it for the world. Was he planning to take a reserved seat or sit out in the

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right-field bleachers as he usually did? "Bleachers," Winfield said. "I wouldn't sit anywhere except Row L. It was good enough for me when I was a boy and it's still good enough for me now."

Right then and there, listening to this, I knew how I was going to murder him.

I left the building immediately, stopped to make one purchase in a hardware store, and returned to my hotel room. The rest of that day and that night, I went over and over my plan, making sure there were no flaws in it. It was simple enough. I would go to Wrigley Field the next day, buy a bleacher ticket, and take a seat in the row behind where Winfield would be sitting. I would watch the game and I would watch him, and when it was over I would slip up close to him in the crowd and stab him with the thin sharp knife I had bought in the hardware store.

I didn't see how anything could go wrong. By the time Winfield fell, by the time anyone realized what had happened, I would be lost in the mob of people. No one pays any attention to other fans at a sporting event; the odds against somebody remembering me, being able to describe what I looked like, seemed to me to be a million to one.

A million-to-one shot that I'd be caught, you see?

I didn't sleep much that night. When I did doze off I had nightmares. My subconscious mind acting up, of course—conscience pangs. I had never harmed anyone before, never committed even the smallest of crimes; I had always been a moral and a religious man. But my hatred for Winfield and my desire for revenge were stronger then than any code of ethics. At dawn I was just as determined to go through with the murder as I had been before.

Part of my plan was to arrive at the ball park as early as possible, so I would be sure to get a ticket and so I would be waiting for Winfield when he showed up. I left my hotel at eleven o'clock, with the knife in my overcoat pocket. It was noon when I got to Wrigley Field. I had to stand in line but I had no trouble buying a ticket. And no trouble finding a seat in Row M in the right-field bleachers.

I didn't have to wait long for Winfield. He came fifteen minutes later, wearing a fine camel's-hair coat that made him look out of place among the more poorly dressed bleacherites. Some of them gave him hostile looks, but he didn't seem to notice, or to care if he did; he was the kind of man who took pleasure in knowing that he was better off than most.

He sat down several seats to the left of where I was and bought

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a bag of popcorn and another of peanuts. There was no one sitting directly behind him; I moved right away and claimed that seat. Winfield didn't look around, then or at any time after the game began. Not that it would have mattered if he had because he wouldn't have known me.

I didn't care much about baseball in those days; it was only after what happened that afternoon that I took an interest in the game. I hardly noticed what was taking place down on the field. It all appeared remote, unimportant. I stood up when the other fans did, clapped and cheered when they did, because the last thing I wanted to do was to call attention to myself—but most of the time I concentrated on what I intended to do to Winfield. And tried to fight down the tension that was building inside me.

The game seemed to drag on interminably. There were a lot of base hits—singles, doubles, home runs—and they made each of the first four innings last a maddening length of time. Winfield was enjoying himself. He clapped louder, rooted harder than anyone else. That was all right with me. Let the condemned man enjoy himself, I thought, it's the last baseball game he'll ever see. But the tension was beginning to get to me. I was so wound up with it that I felt I would burst.

Then came the top of the fifth inning.

And that was when it happened—the million-to-one shot.

All at once, or so it seemed to me, there was commotion throughout the stands—everyone rising to his feet, shouting and booing. I stood up too, automatically, and when I realized what was going on it was as if I had been drenched with a bucket of ice water.

The player standing at home plate was making defiant gestures with his bat, pointing with his bat toward the right-field bleachers. And I had the sudden strange feeling that he was pointing straight at me.

Seconds later the batter took his stance at the plate, the pitcher wound up and threw the ball, and there was a sharp booming crack that to me sounded as loud as a thunderclap. The ball sailed upward and outward in a high arc and came hurtling toward me. Straight at me at terrific speed, and right to where I was standing behind Winfield in those bleachers.

"Wait, grandad," Jack interrupted. "Are you going to tell me the ball hit you or hit Winfield? That somehow that was what kept you from killing him?"

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"That's not what I'm going to tell you at all," the old man said. "The ball didn't hit Winfield and it didn't hit me either; I ducked just in time—I believe it *would* have hit me if I hadn't—and someone in the row behind me caught it. No, son, the million-to-one shot was that player pointing his bat and then hitting the ball exactly where he had indicated he would, straight at me.

"But it wasn't just a coincidence, not to my mind. You can believe this or not, but it was as if the whole incident was guided by divine hands—a kind of message from God to me. And the message was: 'Thou shalt not kill.' "

Jack sat very still on his chair. The silence in the room, it seemed to the old man, was almost reverent.

"Believe it or not, just as I said. But I felt it and for me it *was* a religious experience. I left the ball park right away and threw the knife in a trash bin and hitchhiked back home to Indiana. I never saw Winfield again. And I've never thought of killing another human being since that day."

He watched Jack's face as he spoke, and relief moved through him: the determination and the hatred had melted away, leaving only a weary resignation. It was going to be all right.

Jack looked up at him then, with a small frown creasing his forehead. There was a half-answered question in his eyes.

"Yes, that's right," the old man said, nodding. "It all took place in the famous third game of the 1932 World Series between the New York Yankees and the Chicago Cubs. And the player who pointed with his bat, the player who hit that home run off Chicago pitcher Charley Root, was Babe Ruth."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 519th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a kind of folksy, down-home mystery about a death in Watson Corners . . .

The author, Herschel Cozine, is not an unpublished writer—he has written considerably in the field of children's literature, for "Humpty Dumpty," "Playmate," "Cricket," and others; but this is his first adult fiction. He is in his late forties, married, and has three children. Until recently he has been employed by an electronics firm as a chemist, but now he devotes his time to freelance writing except for his interests in "sports of almost every kind, reading, and stamp collecting" . . .

A FITTING EPITAPH

by HERSCHEL COZINE

Cliff Eldridge, Sheriff of Watson Corners, had not been informed of the death of Jesse Martin until the body had been taken to the morgue. He didn't take the oversight personally. The local public officials who were not incompetent often took short cuts as a matter of expediency. In this case the city police had most likely chosen to forget that the death had occurred outside the city limits rather than deal with Clem, the bumbling deputy who was on duty at the time the call came in.

Whatever the reason, Cliff was obliged to view Jesse at the morgue, where he lay grotesquely on a marble slab, still tied up with a rope around his neck. The rope was ordinary clothesline, doubled over for added strength. Jesse's hands and feet were also tied with the same rope. It was new rope, with the folds from the packaging still evident.

Sam Nichols, the coroner, stood a few feet away, his myopic eyes darting back and forth as he watched the sheriff. Cliff straightened

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and turned to the little man. "When can I have a preliminary report, Sam?"

"Got one right here, Sheriff," Sam replied, handing a sheet of paper to Cliff with an official flourish that was characteristically overdone. Cliff grunted his thanks and stuffed the paper in his pocket.

"Call me when the p.m. is complete."

Sam's eyes began to water and his scrawny face turned the color of a corroded penny. Cliff forced back a smile, remembering the coroner's squeamishness where autopsies were concerned. Cliff would have to depend on Doc Morrow to do the job if he wanted it done right. Doc was an old friend who knew his way around Sam Nichols' office and could examine the deceased without ruffling the coroner's sanctimonious feathers.

Back in his office, Cliff settled his thin frame into a chair and scanned the report without enthusiasm. Jesse Martin had been found by his wife, Emma, on Monday morning. The time of death had not yet been determined. The cause of death had tentatively been listed as strangulation by hanging. No external injuries had been found.

Clem the deputy stood behind Cliff, reading over his shoulder, mouthing the words silently as he read.

"Sooey-side, no doubt," Clem said, pronouncing the word as if it was some sort of Chinese delicacy.

"Hardly," Cliff replied. "His hands and feet were tied." He paused long enough, he hoped, for this to make an impression on his deputy. "And this note was pinned to his shirt." He held up a piece of brown wrapping paper with the words *sic semper tyrannus* scrawled on it in black marking ink.

"You see," Clem said with a note of triumph. "He was sick. He killed hisself just as sure as I'm standin' here."

Cliff suppressed a destructive urge. "That's not what it means, Clem. Those were the words used by John Wilkes Booth when he assassinated Lincoln."

A gleam of understanding crossed Clem's eyes, dissolving as fast as it appeared. He wrote something on a note pad. "There's your man, Chief," he said. "Find this Booth fella and we got our killer."

Cliff sighed and leaned back in his chair, tapping his pencil on the edge of the desk. "Clem, I don't know how to tell you this, but John Wilkes Booth has been dead for more than a hundred years."

Clem's face crumpled into a mass of disappointed wrinkles. He scratched a line through the name he had written on the pad. "Well,"

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he sighed, "that narrows it down some."

Cliff winced visibly. He threw the report in the desk drawer and slammed it shut. "I want you to go down to Harper's Hardware and get a list of all the people who bought clothesline rope in the past two weeks," he said to his deputy. "Harper's would be the only place in town that sells it."

Clem moved like a happy puppy. "You got it, Chief," he said, slamming his hat on his head as he dashed for the door. He almost ran over Doc Morrow who ducked just in time to avoid a collision.

"What's the rush?" Doc said, rearranging his hair as he sank heavily into the chair by Cliff's desk.

"I gave him a job to do," Cliff replied. "He'll botch it, no doubt, and I'll end up doing it myself. But it will keep him busy for a while." He sat back and tilted his swivel chair at a crazy angle. "Do me a favor, Doc?"

"Depends on what it is," Doc said cautiously.

"I'd like a professional evaluation of the condition of Jesse Martin's body. He apparently died by hanging, but I'm not satisfied. It's hard to imagine someone forcing a man to hang himself, and it would take a pretty big man to put old Jesse's head through a noose unless he had lots of help."

"Suicide?" Doc made the question sound like a verdict.

"No. His hands and feet were tied. And this note makes sense only if someone other than Jesse wrote it."

Cliff handed Doc the note that was found on Jesse's shirt. Doc took it, read it, and frowned. "If I remember my Latin from med school, it means, 'Thus be it ever to tyrants,' or something close to that."

"Yeah," Cliff said. "And Jesse was a tyrant, all right. But it takes a certain type of mind to compose such a thing. Who in Watson Corners, present company excluded, would write a death note in Latin, and why?"

Doc folded his hands over his ample stomach and studied his shoes thoughtfully. "Well," he said, "there's Matthew, Jesse's brother."

Cliff sat up straight. "You might have something there, Doc. He's a history professor at that college in Eureka."

"And an expert on the Civil War, I understand," Doc added.

"Have you seen him around here lately?"

Doc shook his head. "Haven't seen Matt in two or three months. But Eureka is less than a hundred miles from here."

Cliff read the note again, pulling at his nose as he puzzled over

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the cryptic message. "It doesn't seem to fit," he said half to himself.

"What do you mean?" Doc asked.

"If someone goes to the trouble of hanging a man when a good thump on the head would do the job faster, why would he let it be known that it was murder and not suicide? And why the note? It seems ritualistic, like the Manson killings."

"Maybe we have a psycho on our hands," Doc offered.

"Yeah," Cliff sighed. "But if that's the case, I don't think Matthew Martin is our man. He's no psycho."

Doc shrugged. "Don't be too sure," he said. "Murders like this happen every day, and the killer continues to live in a society that has no idea he's a killer. Look at the Boston Strangler, for example. A little weird at times, but only *after* he confessed did his friends remember the odd behavior."

"Okay, Doc," Cliff said. "You've convinced me. At least I have to consider the possibility that Matthew could have killed his brother." He unfolded from his chair and patted the gun on his hip. "I'll take a run out to the Martin farm. Emma should be able to tell me if Matt's been around recently. Besides, I'd like to have a look around the barn. I might turn up something the police overlooked."

He opened the door and stepped out into the wilting heat of the July afternoon. Turning to Doc who had followed close behind, he asked, "When can I have the autopsy report?"

"Have it for you tomorrow afternoon," Doc said.

It didn't surprise Cliff that Emma Martin was alone when he arrived at the house. Nor was he surprised that she was tending to her chores as if nothing had happened. Emma was a frail woman with a narrow face that wore a perpetual look of defeat, put there by years of marriage to a man who had mistreated and bullied her to a degree far beyond most people's endurance.

Cliff wondered why she had stayed with Jesse Martin all these years. They had no children to hold them together, and their marriage could not have been an easy one for Emma. Well, there was no accounting for people. Jesse must have filled a need in the woman—a need for martyrdom, or self-pity, or perhaps the sympathy of her few friends.

"Come in, Sheriff," she said in a voice that matched her appearance. "I've been expectin' you."

Cliff bowed slightly and took off his hat. She waved feebly to a worn chair in the corner of a stark, sparsely furnished room that was badly in need of a coat of paint. He thanked her and sat down,

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twisting to a position that was tolerable if not comfortable.

Emma Martin sat on the edge of a rocking chair, twisting her apron, her eyes downcast. "I suppose you want to know how I came to find Jesse."

Cliff nodded and waited while Emma rocked back and forth, scratching her forearm with fingers that showed the effects of years of neglect and hard work.

"Nothin' to tell, really," she said finally. "I went out to the barn to feed the chickens and there he was, swingin' like a sack of grain from the rafters." She twisted harder at the hem of her apron.

"With his hands and feet tied?" Cliff asked.

Emma looked up sharply, then returned her gaze to a spot on the floor by her feet. "Yep. And a note with some kind of Greek on it. Don't know what it means."

"Latin," Cliff corrected. "It means, 'thus be it ever to tyrants.' Do you have any idea why someone would leave a note like that?"

Emma shook her head. Her expression was blank, but Cliff got the feeling that she thought the note a fitting epitaph for Jesse. "Don't make no sense at all. I reckon somebody had it in for Jesse and thought he was some kind of a tyrant. He wasn't. Always treated me fair." The sag in her shoulders deepened as she uttered the lie.

Cliff changed the subject. "Has Matt been around lately?"

"Yesterday," Emma said. "Him and Jesse got into a terrible fuss over something. He left without so much as a by-your-leave."

Cliff tugged at his ear, suddenly alert. "An argument? What about?"

"Don't know, Sheriff. Jesse stormed off and I didn't see him again until I found him out there in the barn."

"Was Matt down there with him?"

Emma looked up, her gray eyes boring into Cliff's. "You ain't accusin' Matthew of killin' poor Jesse, are you?"

"I'm not accusing anyone of anything at this point, Mrs. Martin. But I have to consider all possibilities."

"Well," she sighed. "I guess he was down there for a spell, but I don't know for sure. They both disappeared for the day. Neither of them showed for dinner."

"Didn't you get worried?"

"No reason to," she said. "Jesse did that a lot. He'd go away for a whole night, sometimes longer, without tellin' me. I figgered him and Matthew had gone into town to patch up their differences over a glass of beer."

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"And that's the last time you saw them?"

"That's right," she said. "Leastwise that's the last time I seen Matthew." She pushed a stray hair back into the bun on her neck. "Didn't see Jesse neither till this mornin' down at the barn."

"I see," Cliff said. He cleared his throat. "Did you and Matthew get along?"

Emma stiffened slightly at the question. "We got along middlin' well," she said after a long pause. "We was sweethearts once, you know."

Cliff looked at the pathetic figure with the plain face and bent shape as she rocked back and forth. It was hard to believe that Matthew, the distinguished history professor, could have found anything in Emma to attract him. But then she hadn't always been this way. Perhaps years ago she was pretty, vivacious, a girl full of life and promise. Cliff tried to visualize this, but the image seemed ludicrous.

Emma went on talking, more to herself than to her guest. "That was before his highfalutin education at that fancy college got him to thinkin' he was too good for us plain folks." A trace of bitterness edged her voice.

"What time was it when you found Jesse?" he asked.

"About seven this morning," she said. "I always feed the chickens first thing. Even before Jesse and me. Yep, about seven, maybe a bit sooner." She fluttered a thin hand over her eyes. "I called the police as soon as I found him."

"May I have a look at the barn?" Cliff asked.

"Go right ahead, Sheriff," Emma said. "Ain't much to see, though. It's just a regular old barn."

Emma's description was an accurate one. The barn was small by most standards, consisting of a horse stall which stood empty and free of any straw or hay. The rest of the ground floor contained tools and small-farm machinery. A small hayloft in the rear half of the barn was stacked with baled hay. The rafter that had served as a launching pad for Jesse's journey to the great beyond ran the length of the barn. Directly beneath it in the center of the floor were two bales of hay lying next to each other.

"How long have these bales been here?" Cliff asked.

"Don't know," Emma said. "They was here when I found Jesse. But I don't recall seein' them there yesterday."

Cliff supposed they had been placed there by whoever was responsible for Jesse's death. One on top of the other would give enough

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lift to hang a man. The top one had most likely been dislodged by the swinging body.

There was no sign of a struggle. Everything was in place as far as Cliff could determine. How could someone overpower a man of Jesse's size, tie him up, put his head through a noose, and lift him struggling to the top of two bales of hay? Cliff shook his head and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"You heard nothing unusual last night or this morning?"

Emma shook her head. "Nope. Nothin' except the old rooster crowin' like he always does."

"Well, Mrs. Martin, I won't trouble you any more. But if you think of anything that might be helpful, please call."

Emma nodded. "Don't know what I'm gonna do now that Jesse is gone," she said wearily. It was a simple statement uttered in a monotone, but her eyes took on a life that surprised Cliff—a subtle spark that was quickly gone.

"I'm sorry," Cliff said. He touched his cap in a gesture of farewell and left her standing in the barn.

Clem was waiting for him when he entered the office, his face beaming like a lighthouse. "Got that list you wanted, Chief," he said. He handed Cliff a piece of paper. There was a single name written on it.

"You call this a list?" Cliff said.

"That's everybody who bought rope from Old Man Harper," Clem puffed out his chest and smiled. "Recognize the name, Chief?"

Cliff scowled at his deputy. "Of course I recognize the name. Jesse Martin, the deceased."

"That's right," Clem said. "Killed by his own rope. That's sooey-side, I tell you."

"Clem," Cliff sighed. "Using one's own rope to kill a man is not suicide. Take my word for it."

"If you say so, Chief," Clem said, obviously disappointed that his theory had been so flatly rejected. "You're the one with the college education."

"Are you sure this is everybody?" Cliff asked, pointing to the paper.

"Positive," Clem said. "Old Man Harper don't have much call for clothesline these days, what with dryers and such."

"Okay," Cliff said. "Take the rest of the day off. You did a good job."

"Thank you, Chief," Clem said brightly, lapping up the compli-

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ment like a bear cub in a honey jar. "This case is as good as solved."

"If your brain was as great as your optimism, you'd be a genius," Cliff said.

"Well, I reckon that's the nicest thing anyone ever said to me. Thanks again." Clem smiled a huge toothy smile and waddled down the street, whistling tunelessly as he went. Cliff shook his head ruefully, watching the barrel-shaped deputy until he turned the corner at the end of the block. The San Francisco Police Department, a nightmarish job that he came north to get away from, seemed more attractive with each passing day.

Although Eureka was less than a hundred miles from Watson Corners, the road was narrow, climbing and falling through dense redwood forests laden with logging trucks that labored slowly along the highway. It took Cliff nearly three hours to make the trip and he wearily braked his car to a stop on a residential street flanked with walnut trees that lent a middle-class atmosphere to the quiet neighborhood.

Matthew Martin's house was an unimposing structure set back from the road by a neatly kept lawn bordered with a variety of greenery, mainly privet and oleander. The wrought-iron gate stood partly open. Cliff pushed through, climbed the stone steps to the porch, and pressed the button by the door. A moment later he heard the sound of a chain lock being unhooked, followed quickly by the soft click of the doorknob as the door swung open.

Matthew Martin was as refined as Jesse had been coarse. A small man with a thin mustache and a generous head of hair brushed neatly back and graying at the temples, he presented a picture of professional integrity and sophistication.

Although it was almost noon, he was dressed in a lounging robe and slippers and held a thick book, marking his place with the index finger of his left hand. His deepset eyes studied Cliff from head to toe until the sheriff shifted uncomfortably from one foot to another.

"Sheriff Eldridge," Matt said at last in a rich classroom baritone that had been polished by years of lecturing. "Come in, please."

He stood back and let Cliff pass into the dim interior of the foyer, closing the door silently behind him. "I was catching up on some reading," he said, leading Cliff down the hall to a small study lined with bookshelves bulging with volumes of richly bound books. He motioned him to an overstuffed chair, waited until his guest was seated, then slid into another overstuffed chair and crossed his legs.

"Is this a business call?" he said, raising a bushy eyebrow.

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Cliff nodded. "I'm here about your brother, Jesse," he said.

The eyebrow raised again and his eyes darkened. "Is he in some kind of trouble?" The question was accompanied by a resigned sigh.

Cliff dropped his eyes to the patterned rug and leaned forward. "He's dead."

Matt sat up straight and dropped the book in his lap. "Dead! Jesse?" His face paled and his hands shook slightly. "When? How?"

"He was found by Emma yesterday. Strung up in the barn," Cliff said softly. "I assumed you knew."

"No. I had no idea," Matt said. "How terrible."

"There's evidence to indicate foul play," Cliff said.

"Murder?" The professor massaged his temples. "What evidence?"

Cliff reached in his pocket and pulled out the note, deciding for the moment not to tell Matt about the matter of Jesse's hands and feet. If the man was acting, it was a good act. But until Cliff was satisfied that the professor was not involved he wanted to keep an edge. He handed the note to Matt and watched carefully as the man read it.

"Strange," Matt said, handing the note back to Cliff. "I assume this was found on Jesse's body."

Cliff nodded. "What do you make of it?"

Matt leaned back and pulled a pipe from his pocket, tamped the bowl with his finger, and put a match to it. He puffed it to life slowly and exhaled a gray cloud of smoke before replying. "Jesse was a tyrant, I must admit. And he had his share of enemies. But I know of no one who would kill him in cold blood as this note indicates." He puffed thoughtfully for several moments, then added, "For that matter I'm not convinced it's possible for someone to hang a man against his will. Lynching went out with Wyatt Earp. Even then it was an act committed by a group of people, certainly not a one-to-one situation. Emma most assuredly would have heard a disturbance."

"Agreed," said Cliff. "And I can't think of too many people in Watson Corners who would even know what *sic semper tyrannus* means. Emma thought it was Greek."

Professor Martin snorted loudly. "Poppycock," he said. "Emma knows full well what it means."

"Oh?" Cliff said, suddenly interested. "Why do you say that?"

"Sheriff, I reluctantly admit that at one time Emma and I were engaged to be married. I realized almost too late what a tragic mistake that would be. But while we were—er—lovers, so to speak,

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we spent hours discussing history. Particularly the Civil War." His eyes narrowed. "She knows what *sic semper tyrannus* means as well as you and I."

"But Emma—" Cliff started.

Matt seemed to read his mind. He smiled and leaned forward, resting his elbows on the arms of the chair. "Don't let her colloquialisms and her backwoods talk mislead you, Sheriff. She's a shrewd woman." He punctured the air with the stem of his pipe and looked at Cliff, his eyes flashing. "Emma never forgave me for breaking our engagement. She married Jesse to spite me. Her defeated attitude and her folksy talk is her way of making me pay for my sin. She enjoys being a martyr—it's designed to play on my guilt feelings." He laughed without humor. "She's wasting her time, of course. I have no regrets about what I did."

"Well, that puts a new light on the case," Cliff said. "Do you think Emma killed Jesse?"

Matt shook his head vigorously. "No. That's not her style. In the first place it doesn't fit with her image as a martyr. And she's much too frail to tangle with Jesse unless she had help."

Cliff changed the subject. "Emma tells me you were over there Sunday afternoon."

Matt nodded. "That's right."

"Did Jesse seem upset?"

The professor thought for a moment. "Well, he wasn't as cantankerous as usual, and he seemed a little preoccupied now that you mention it."

"Why did you go see him?"

Matt laced his manicured fingers together and placed them under his chin. "When mother passed away she left Jesse and me a small inheritance. I invested it for both of us. The stock I invested in has taken a rather sharp drop during the past week, so I drove over to see what Jesse wanted to do."

"Did you have an argument?"

"Did Emma tell you that?"

Cliff nodded and Matt sighed, pursed his lips thoughtfully, and studied a spot on the wall by Cliff's head. "It wasn't much of an argument. Jesse was upset about the stock's decline and called me a few uncomplimentary names. Quite mild for Jesse, actually, and it was over almost before it started. In fact"—Matt smiled as if at some secret joke—"Jesse took it quite well. That's what I meant when I said he wasn't as cantankerous as usual."

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"I see," Cliff said. "One more question. It seems odd that you would not know of Jesse's death, being as you're his only blood relative."

"That's Emma for you," Matt replied. "She wouldn't give me the time of day if I got down on my hands and knees."

Cliff rose slowly from the comfortable chair, still feeling the stiffness in his legs from the long drive. He stretched and held out his hand. Matt shook it.

"I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, Professor," he said. "Please accept my condolences."

"Thank you, Sheriff," Matt said, then added, "If I don't seem properly grief-stricken, forgive me. Jesse and I were not very close, and I don't feel the loss as much as some people might. Still, he was flesh and blood and I'm truly sorry."

They walked down the hall, their muffled footsteps whispering in the stillness of the house. Matt opened the door, extended his hand again, and thanked the sheriff for coming.

"Emma should be well off now, what with the insurance money she'll be getting from Jesse's policy."

Cliff stopped abruptly. "Insurance? Jesse had an insurance policy?"

"Took it out about a year ago, right after mother died," Matt said. "He used part of his inheritance to pay the first premium."

"Wasn't that out of character?"

Matt shrugged. "Perhaps. Maybe he had a twinge of conscience about the way he had treated Emma through the years, and this was his way of making up for it."

"How much is the policy worth?"

"Fifty thousand, I believe," Matt said.

"Did Emma know about it?"

"Yes, she did. But she didn't seem to care much one way or the other. Stoic old girl, Emma."

By the time Cliff guided his car into the parking slot in front of his office he had formulated an answer to the mystery of Jesse Martin's death—the only answer that made sense. His conversation with Professor Martin had provided the key, and all Cliff needed was Doc's autopsy report to substantiate it.

Doc was waiting for him, his dark eyes twinkling as they did when he had news to relate. "I thought you may have decided to chuck this country living and go back to the good life in San Francisco," Doc said.

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"It crossed my mind," Cliff replied, tossing his hat toward the rack where it bounced off and settled on the bare wooden floor. Cliff left it there, picked up a styrofoam cup, and filled it with coffee. He sat down wearily behind his desk, propped his feet up against the window ledge, and sipped the coffee gingerly.

"Well, Doc," he said, "what did you find when you examined Jesse? A surprise or two, I bet."

"How did you know?"

"Just a feeling," Cliff said. "What's the surprise?"

"First of all," Doc said, "Jesse's hands and feet were tied *after* he died." He paused and looked at Cliff, waiting for a reaction. Cliff sipped his coffee silently, then nodded.

"How can you tell?"

"The small veins in his wrists were broken, but there was no hemorrhaging." He searched Cliff's face. "You don't seem surprised."

"What else did you find?" Cliff asked.

"Jesse had a terminal disease—he couldn't have had more than three months to live."

"Weren't you his doctor? You should have known about that."

Doc shook his head emphatically. "Jesse wasn't my patient. He got sore at me a couple of years back and was seeing Dr. Jennings in San Tomas."

Clem, who had come in a few minutes before, snorted triumphantly. "I told you it was sooey-side, didn't I, Chief? Killed with his own rope, and what with that note about him bein' sick and all. Shucks, it don't take no college degree to figger *that* out."

"You're a regular Sherlock Holmes," Cliff said, glancing at Doc.

"Sherlock who?" Clem asked.

"Never mind," Cliff said.

Doc leaned forward, a quizzical look on his rough-hewn face. "Judging from your reaction, you must have found something out when you talked to Matthew."

"Maybe," Cliff said cryptically. "At any rate, suicide *is* the only logical explanation. Now that you've confirmed it, I know who's responsible for the deception." He stood up and crossed the room. Picking up his hat, he placed it on his head and went to the door. "Come on, Doc. Let's go for a ride."

Emma Martin eyed Doc and Cliff suspiciously as they stood on the rotting porch waiting for her to invite them inside. When she made no move to do so, Cliff removed his hat and twirled it in his

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hands. "Mrs. Martin, I think it's time you told me what *really* happened."

Emma's eyes darkened and her frail body seemed to shrink. She took a step backward and wordlessly invited the two men in. They stepped into the room and stood by the door while Emma seated herself stiffly in a chair.

Cliff cleared his throat. "When you found Jesse the other morning, the first thing you thought about was the insurance. There's a suicide clause in the policy, isn't there, Emma?"

Emma sat stony-faced, not looking at him.

"That's easy enough to verify," Cliff went on. "You tied him up, then planted that phony note to put the suspicion on Matt."

Emma shifted uncomfortably in her chair, her hands trembling noticeably as she folded them in her lap.

"It was a chance to get back at him after all these years," Cliff said softly. "You never forgave him for breaking your engagement. Now you had a chance to punish him and collect the insurance money as well."

Emma lifted her eyes from her lap and looked directly at Cliff. Her lower lip quivered, and Cliff felt a surge of pity for the woman.

"Jesse had no right," she said with a vehemence that startled Cliff. "All these years I put up with his meanness and spite and cruelty." She swallowed hard. "Then he goes and hangs himself and cheats me out of what's rightly mine." Her voice trailed off to a whisper. "He had no right."

Doc shifted his feet and stared at the wall. Cliff started to reach out toward the woman, then dropped his hand to his side.

"What's gonna happen to me, Sheriff?" she asked.

Cliff shook his head. "That's up to the insurance company. As far as I'm concerned the matter is closed."

Emma's eyes misted over as she looked at Cliff pleadingly. Then she did something that people in Watson Corners hadn't seen her do in 20 years. Emma Martin put her head in her hands and cried.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Charlie Dark story by

BRIAN GARFIELD

A thought has just occurred to us: an impossible assignment to an agent or a counterspy is, in its own way, "an impossible crime"—in reverse. Just as the great criminal of fiction is the other side of the coin—the great detective in reverse (Raffles and Holmes, Lupin and Lecoq). So Charlie Dark is always given a "locked room" puzzle to solve, a "miracle problem" to resolve. This time his boss Rice admits that the job is impossible—"I don't think you can do it"—but it's Charlie Dark's baby anyway, and Charlie always has to keep proving himself—by doing it the hard way . . .

PASSPORT FOR CHARLIE

by *BRIAN GARFIELD*

Rice lives for the day when I fall down on the job. I suppose he thinks it will prove I'm no better than he is after all. He keeps throwing impossible jobs my way; the only way I can get revenge is to bring them off and show him up. One of these days I will come a cropper—or I'll bring off a feat so incredible it will blow all his fuses. That's the nature of the tug-of-war between us.

Rice said, "The van was hijacked between the printer's and the Atlanta office. The Bureau traced the shipment to Miami. A day too late."

"How many?" I asked.

"Four thousand. Genuine U.S. passport blanks."

"Uh-huh. Worth a bloody fortune on the illegal market," I observed.

"Not if you recover them. That's your job. I don't think you can do it—I don't think anybody can—but it's in your ample lap." He blew smoke from his noxious Havana toward my face and favored

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me with his barracuda smile. "Bon voyage, Charlie. Don't come back without the passports."

The F.B.I. agent didn't resent the imposition; he was relieved to pass the buck and said as much—he was convinced the shipment had left his jurisdiction and that was fine with him; the headache was ours now.

"It was organized. They weren't two-cent stickup men. Two or three private cars were used to bring the passports to an assembly point here in Coral Gables. We nailed one of the hijackers, you know—blind luck but we've got him and he's willing to testify. A deal for a light sentence provided we give him protection. The Bureau's taken it to the Justice Department and I'm pretty sure they'll agree to it. Trouble is, he doesn't know enough to help you."

"I'll talk to him anyway if you don't mind."

His name was Julio Torres and he was a sad man—a Cuban, down on his luck. He was heavy, nearly as fat as I am, but not so tall. I guessed his age at 45. He had a black mustache and callused hands. In the interrogation cell we both overlapped our wooden chair seats.

"Who recruited you for the robbery?"

"He calls himself Obregon. I never heard his first name."

"Cuban?"

"No. I think Puerto Rican."

"What was your job?"

"To follow the van and drug the crew."

"How?"

"They stopped for lunch in a truckers' café. I followed them in and put something in their coffee."

"Chloral hydrate?"

"I don't know. Obregon gave it to me and told me to put it in the coffee." He gave me a wry look. "I'm not a pharmacist, you know."

"Then?"

"Then I drove the car. When we saw the van pull over we waited a few minutes to make sure they were asleep; and then Obregon drilled into the van and one of the others got behind the wheel and started it up, and we convoyed it to the hiding place at the farm."

"Whose farm was it?"

"I don't know. Some sharecropper's. I think it must have been abandoned for years. The driveway was all overgrown. Anyway I

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followed the van in my car and Obregon drove another car and there was a third guy in a third car. We transferred the cartons to the trunks of our three cars and drove away separately."

"So that if one of you were caught, it would only cost one-third of the shipment."

"I guess that was the idea, yes. I delivered my car in Coral Gables last night."

"To where?"

"A private house a couple blocks off the Tamiami Trail. I gave the F.B.I. people the address, they already checked it out. I don't think they found anything. It was just a drop, you know. I guess Obregon or one of the other guys picked up the car from there. I left the keys under the mat and walked away after I collected my money, which was in the mailbox like they said it would be.

"Then the next day I was arrested because one of the van drivers saw me on the street and recognized me from the truckers' café. See, I tripped against one of the drivers in the café and spilled a little root beer on him—that was how I distracted them when I dumped the drug in their coffee, so the guy noticed me then and he recognized me the next day. An unbelievable stroke of bad luck, you know, but that's been my life. But I guess you don't want the story of my life, do you?"

"Who does Obregon work for?"

"I have no idea."

"Describe him."

"Well, he's thin. Let's see, sort of bald, no chin. Thirty, maybe thirty-five. A mustache—not bushy like mine, a thin neat mustache. He looks like an Indio."

"Did he speak to you in English?"

"Spanish. His English is poor."

"Puerto Rican accent?"

"Yes. I think he must live over there. Something he said, I can't remember what it was, it made me think he only came over to the mainland for this job."

I checked into the Condado Beach in a rainstorm and had a big meal in the Sheraton's Penthouse restaurant with a lovely view of the sprawled urban lights of San Juan. From 20 stories high at night you don't see the poverty.

In the morning I went through the ancient walls into Old San Juan down to the harborfront Federal Building and met for half an

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hour with F.B.I. and customs men, after which we trooped over to police headquarters and I went through mug files with the help of a San Juan detective lieutenant. We turned up a sheet on a man named Jorge Ruiz Orozco, a/k/a José Raoul Obregon, a/k/a Juan R. Ortiz, and so forth; his picture met the description I'd had from Julio Torres in Miami and his rap-sheet seemed to fit: he'd been arrested several times for smuggling and receiving stolen goods and had taken two falls in prison, once in Florida and once in Mexico.

We sent a bulletin out via the Bureau and Interpol and the Agency. There had been no public announcement of the Torres arrest and there was a chance Orozco-Obregon-Ortiz might not have gone to ground; if he felt he was safe he might be out in public somewhere. The Puerto Rican police had copies of his mug shot in their cars but when he turned up four days later it was over in Charlotte Amalie and I went there to visit his cell before they extradited him to Florida.

He was sullen and not very talkative. I had to make a few threats. We can be testy about that sort of thing because the Agency doesn't concern itself with courts and appeals; I didn't care if they convicted him or not—I wanted information from him. He had a sister in Ponce and a brother in Mayaguez and an elderly mother in San Juan. I mentioned a few things that might start happening to them: the sister could lose her driver's license, the brother could lose his taxicab in an accident, the aged mother could learn that her Social Security payments and Medicare were being discontinued because of irregularities in her records—a hundred little harassments like that. After a while Obregon gave me a name.

From St. Thomas I flew back to San Juan on a twin-engine Islander and made the connecting flight to Washington with an hour to spare—time to eat a fair meal between planes. I was in Rice's office by half-past four.

I said, "Obregon was hired for the job by Parker Dortmunder."

Rice blew Havana smoke at me. "Obregon actually gave you Dortmunder's name?"

"No. Dortmunder wouldn't be that stupid. Obregon gave me a description and a name. The name's one of the aliases Bertine has used before and the description fits Bertine. Bertine works for Dortmunder, or did last time I heard. I think if we find Dortmunder we find the passport blanks."

"Find Bertine," Rice said. "Leave Dortmunder alone, Charlie."

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"Why?"

He shook his head. "No need to know."

I was a little angry. "Bertine's just a gopher. Look, Dortmunder doesn't paint himself into corners. He's a broker, not an inventory dealer—he doesn't steal things on spec. He wouldn't have run this caper if he didn't have a prearranged buyer for the passports. They were stolen to order. Now the fastest way to find them is to pull him in and find out who he sold them to."

"I'm sorry, Charlie. We're using Dortmunder at the moment. We need him." He jabbed the cigar toward me. "Don't touch him. Find the passports but don't annoy Dortmunder."

"If I nail Bertine does that come under the heading of annoying Dortmunder?"

"Yes. You can shadow him but don't touch him."

"Tell me, how many more obstacles do you intend to toss in front of me?"

"Just get the passports back, Charlie." I think it was his grin that infuriated me to the point where I resolved to do it—just to show him up.

Dortmunder was a free-lance espionage middleman; he bought and sold secrets as well as international arms and various clandestine goods like bullion, slaves, and narcotics. His stamping ground was the Mediterranean. Despite my anger I could understand Rice's point; Dortmunder was a pill, but he was a useful one. He sold information to us that we wouldn't otherwise get. Therefore we tolerated him and let him run. Such is the cynicism of the trade; such is the mechanism by which the Dortmunders survive. All his customers have a vested interest in his survival.

I didn't care about Dortmunder one way or the other, but Rice's stricture made the job much harder than it had to be—that was what annoyed me. It would have been a simple matter to harass Dortmunder into selling out the passport buyer to us; it wouldn't have hurt Dortmunder to do so, but Rice didn't want to ruffle his feathers, so I had to do it the hard way.

I ran a trace on Bertine and the computers sent me to a 42-foot diesel cabin cruiser the registry of which drew me along a course from San Juan to Tortola to St. Maarten to Nassau. She was tied up in a marina in the Bahamas when I arrived there and I disassembled her bewildered captain in a hotel room on Paradise Island with the help of two Agency stringers.

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The captain was a hired charter operator who ran the Matthews boat for a Swiss company that belonged to Gerard Bertine. After a few hours of defiance and ridicule he eventually saw the light and admitted the cartons of "ledgers" had been collected from him out at sea: a refurbished PBY Catalina flying boat had landed on the water and the transfer of cargo had been made by dinghy. Bertine had gone aboard the airplane with the cargo. A neat dodge, professional—it had the Dortmunder stamp. All this had taken place about 200 miles due east of Nassau four days ago.

Back to the computer. I dug up the registries of half a dozen boats and freighters that tied in with Dortmunder in one way or another. During the time frame in question one of the boats had been in the Atlantic about halfway from Trinidad to Casablanca; another was a half day out of the Azores; and a third was off the Canaries. It suggested a possibility: mid-ocean refueling for the flying boat. At low cruise a PBY has a range of nearly 2000 miles. Plotting a course from ship to ship I found that it pointed toward the mouth of the Mediterranean. It persuaded me that the passports were somewhere between Gibraltar and Istanbul.

That was a bit of help; it was a start. It still left a lot of ground to cover. A PBY can land anywhere on the open water; the passports could have been transferred to a fishing boat off any port in the Med—no customs inspections.

But I thought I knew where they'd gone.

Algiers is where the runaways go. Fugitives from politics and justice are drawn there because of a governmental no-questions-asked attitude. But it's a drab bureaucratic place with little romance or comfort; if you're not rich it's oppressive. After a while the exiles begin to hate it. The place becomes their prison. That's when they begin to inquire into sources of false passports. The trade in high-priced documents is brisk in Algiers.

Four thousand genuine U.S. passport blanks would be worth more than $2,000,000 on that market.

The station stringer in Algiers was a passed-over veteran named Atherton who had no image left to polish. He was contentedly serving out his last hitch before retirement.

In Atherton's travel-agency office I went through the station's files of known dealers in black-market documentation. After several hours of it Atherton gave me a bleak look. "Is this getting us anywhere, Charlie? There's just too damned many of them."

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"We can rule out the small ones. Whoever bought the shipment had to put up cash. Probably half a million dollars or more. It's got to be a big dealer."

"That still leaves a dozen names or more. You want to pin the list on the wall and throw a dart at it?" He made a face and pushed the files aside. "It won't work. Hell, we'd do as well to canvass the fishing docks. The shipment had to come into Algeria somewhere—if it's here at all. It could just as easily be in Marseilles or Alexandria or—"

"If I don't tumble the goods here, I'll go to Marseilles next and then Alexandria and then et cetera. But my nose tells me it's here. The odds are on Algiers."

"If I had four thousand blanks to sell I'd bring 'em here," he agreed. "But it would require an impossible amount of legwork to find them in this maze. The population of dealers is too big, Charlie. We haven't got a hundred investigators on this staff."

"What about Bertine? Has the trace come up with anything?"

"Bertine flew out of Gibraltar two days ago. By now he's in Zurich."

"Gibraltar—that's another clue in favor of Algiers," I said.

He sighed. "Twelve, fourteen, maybe sixteen dealers big enough to handle it. Well, I guess we can go to the cops and start having them tossed."

"Canvassing won't do it," I said. "After we hit one or two of them the rest will get the word. They'll all go to ground. No, we've got to hit the right target with our first shot."

"That calls for fancy shooting."

I said, "We'll need a Judas goat."

I went through all the station's Immigration Surveillance Reports for the past week and selected a card from the stack:

Andrew Grofield—entered Algiers 10/17 via GibAir #7415, carrying U.S. Passport #378916642393 in name of Alan Kelp. Passport is presumed forgery. Inquiry forwarded to Washington in dip bag 10/18. Algeria authorities not informed. Ident Grofield made by Peter McKay, personal observation airport. File #78BV8.

Atherton said, "Grofield. Yeah. Ran some small arms into the Philippines while I was on station there. We had to chase him out. He was supplying guerrillas with AK-47s. He's a petty crook, not a bigshot."

"Does he know your face?"

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"We never met. I know him from photographs."

"He ought to do," I said.

Atherton sent four men out in two cars to look for Grofield. On the second day one of them found him. Atherton said, "It's a girl's flat in the casbah."

"Has he got a hotel booking?"

"No. Staying with the girl. She's a professional. He'll be paying for the time. It suggests he doesn't plan an extended stay in town."

"Good. If he's got appointments in another country he'll be anxious not to be delayed."

"When do we hit him?"

"After I have my dinner."

We sent the two stringers around to cover the rear and posted ourselves in a cramped 2CV at the curb across the street from the stucco warren in which the Turkish call-girl had her flat. Lights burned in her windows and I was hoping they'd soon emerge to go somewhere for a late supper; it was about ten o'clock. The street was emptying of pedestrians: burnoused bedouins, besotted beggars, business-suited bwanas.

We were on the edge of the casbah, its tortuous passages winding away over cobblestones. The smells were pungent, the air heavy. One wonders if the Arab cities attract miscreants and evildoers because of their fetid atmospheres or if it's the other way round.

They didn't come out that night. We wasted it in the car, talking about the old days. Another team took over during the day and we were back the next evening at sundown.

Finally the girl and our mark emerged from the narrow dark entrance. Atherton said, "That's him. Grofield."

The man was burly in white seersucker; he walked like a sailor, a belligerent thrust to his shoulders. The girl had the opulence of a belly dancer: she'd soon be fat.

We gave them a lead and I got out to follow them on foot. Atherton trailed along at a distance in the car in case they snagged a taxi.

We were at the bar when Grofield came away from his table to seek the men's room. He was a little drunk; that was an aid to me. I stepped back from the bar talking heartily to Atherton with wide gestures: "So would you believe the damned crook tried to sell me Chianti for Bardolino?"

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My gesticulating arms made Grofield hesitate and then Atherton stepped out from the bar toward me: "Come on, Joe, you're blocking traffic." In reaching for my arm Atherton lost his balance and blundered against Grofield. I steadied Grofield and leered at him drunkenly, brushing him off. "S'all right, buddy, sorry, these freeways are murder, ain't they?"

Atherton blurted apologies to Grofield in French and English. Grofield brushed us off with a stony glare, squeezed past, and went on toward the gents. I had my hand in my pocket; I turned and walked out of the place. A few minutes afterward, having paid the tab, Atherton followed me out. "Okay?"

"Sure," I said. "I missed my calling. I should have been a dip."

In the morning I went into Atherton's office and reclaimed the passport from his desk. "Did you get a report on it yet?"

"It's phony all right. But a good forgery."

"Then he'll insist on the best when he goes to buy a replacement."

Atherton and I exchanged smiles.

Since his original passport was a phony, Grofield couldn't go to the embassy for a replacement of the one I had stolen from his pocket. That was what we were counting on. He'd have to buy a replacement from an under-the-counter dealer. He wouldn't settle for the kind of counterfeit that most ignorant fugitives would buy; Grofield knew the ropes. We were counting on that.

Atherton's operatives kept a tight tail on Grofield. He emerged that morning from the call-girl's flat with rage on his face and went around Algiers by taxi from one shop to another. Altogether he visited five of them. We kept records of all five addresses. Four of them were on Atherton's list of known dealers.

"We hang back," I said. "At the moment he's just shopping. Looking for the best paper. Keep the reins loose, but don't lose him." I wasn't interested in how many dealers he visited; the one who concerned me was the one to whom Grofield would return.

He gave us a scare that night: he disappeared. He must have used the back door of the girl's building and slipped away into the shadows. When the girl emerged alone from the building in the morning, one of Atherton's men went in wearing the guise of a municipal electric-service repairman and the flat was unoccupied. We did quite a bit of cursing but Grofield returned to the flat in the afternoon, using a key the girl must have given him. He was fairly well drunk

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by his walk. We sent the electrical repairman back in. He knocked at length and there was no reply, so he got through the lock again and found Grofield happily passed out; he went through Grofield's clothes, found no passport, and reported back to us.

Atherton said, "I don't like it."

I said, "It's still running. Look, he didn't come to Algiers for fun. He's got business here, never mind what kind. He must have transacted it during his absence—that was the reason for the secrecy. He didn't think he was being followed, but he made the standard moves anyway. A pro always does. He's probably bought a few cases of rifles and grenades from somebody. Now he'll be ready to leave the country—all he's got to do is wait until his new passport's ready."

"Suppose you're wrong, Charlie?"

"Then I'm wrong and we start over again with another Judas goat. In the meantime we'd better beef up the surveillance on him. Can you spare another two men for a day or two?"

"I can scrape up a couple."

"Stake him out front and back, then. Let's not lose him again."

He led them a merry run that night; we thought we were onto something, but it turned out to be a meeting with a Lebanese armaments smuggler in the back room of a country store about forty kilometers inland from Algiers. Our men watched with eight-power night glasses and had a glimpse of black steel, most of it crated: Kalashnikovs and, they guessed, Claymore mines.

"That's what he's here for," I told Atherton. "He's making a buy. The stuff will go out by boat. Eight weeks from now it'll turn up in Thailand or Indonesia."

"We'll keep tabs on it," he agreed, "find out where it goes. But this isn't getting us to the passports."

"You want to bet?"

One of the paper dealers on Atherton's list was the proprietor of a half-dozen curio shops one of which was situated in the rue Darlan. At eleven in the morning Grofield left his flat, walked two blocks, flagged a taxi from a hotel rank, rode it to the waterfront, walked through an alley, picked up another taxi at a cruise-ship pier, got out of the second taxi at the western end of the casbah wall, almost lost our operatives in a network of passages, and finally led them back to the rue Darlan—his second visit to the curio shop in three days.

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"All right," Atherton said. He was exulting. "Let's give it a toss."

"Not yet," I told him. "Let's make sure."

Grofield went to the airport that evening and bought a seat on the nine-o'clock flight to Geneva. When he checked in at passport control one of Atherton's men had a look at his papers and reported back to us: "You were right. The contents are fake, but the booklet is genuine. How did you know?"

Atherton said, "Do we toss the shop now?"

"No. They wouldn't warehouse the blanks in the shop. If we raid the shop we won't find the shipment. We'll wait for them to lead us to the blanks."

We picked another transient out of the file that night and I did my pickpocket number on him the next afternoon; the transient was no help—he bought a cheap forgery from a bartender in the Avenue Faisal. We had to track three crooks through Algiers before one of them went into the curio shop in the rue Darlan to order a replacement passport. After that it was simple procedurals.

A clerk from the curio shop led us to a house on the mountainside in the high-rent district; when he came out of the house the clerk had a 6x9 manila envelope with him. We took it away from him and found a mint passport blank inside.

That evening six of us raided the big house. We found the cartons of blanks in a safe in the basement. We turned the owner of the house over to the Algerian authorities.

It was anticlimactic. We recovered the passports but didn't touch Bertine, let alone Dortmunder. To this day both of them are buying and selling illicit goods around the Mediterranean; we ourselves are among their steady customers. Such is the cynicism of the trade.

But I did have the satisfaction of beaming in Rice's sour face. Once again he'd given me a job he thought couldn't be done; once again I'd showed him up. I think he lives for the day when I foul one up.

He actually offered me a cigar. He knows how much I hate them. Without even bothering to acknowledge the offer, I turned to leave the office after handing in my report. Rice said, "All right, since you're obviously dying for me to ask. How'd you bring it off?"

"Genius. A tablespoon with every meal." I smiled cherubically.

If Rice thinks I'll give him the satisfaction of telling him how I brought it off, he's crazy. Let him try to figure it out for himself. Maybe he'll get so worked up he'll blow one of his fuses.

That's the day *I* live for.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

REVERE: O frabjous day! When the greatest criminals in fiction are ticked off on the fingers of one hand, I include among them that most terrible of villains, Dr. Fu Manchu, and that most honorable of crooks, A. J. Raffles. Through an act of intelligence and downright benevolence, Barry Perowne acquired from the E. W. Hornung estate more than half a century ago the rights to continue writing adventures of Raffles, which he has done to the present day. In the 1920s and 1930s, the character was altered to become a Saint-like adventurer in modern garb. In the 1950s, at the urging of Frederic Dannay, Perowne again recounted the nefarious doings of the cricketeer-cracksman, this time returning him to the Victorian and Edwardian era in which he correctly belonged. The result has been the most successful series of pastiches in crime fiction, with many astute critics insisting that Perowne's narratives are superior to Hornung's originals.

Now, St. Martin's Press has bestowed another midyear Christmas gift for those of us who admire this memorable character and who look with nostalgic affection at the gaslit era. Perowne's *Raffles of the M.C.C.* ($7.95) is the perfect book for summer reading, with the lagniappe of being able to reread it again and again, even in winter.

REVILE: David Fletcher's *Raffles* has just been issued in paperback (Popular Library, $1.95) and it is a gross miscarriage of justice and intelligence that this collection of short stories (deliberately misidentified as a novel on the front cover) enjoys a reprint while Perowne's infinitely superior books have not been similarly honored. Hornung's own stories were faithfully adapted for British television by Philip Mackie. Fletcher faithfully adapted the television scripts to make up his book. Every bit of plot, every character, every situation, is a direct and clearly identifiable paraphrasing of Hornung's original stories. It's good reading, but turn instead to

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the book of the same name by E. W. Hornung (Penguin, $1.95) for the same stories, better written, and honestly described as a collection.

REMARKABLE: An excellent idea for an anthology of borderline interest to mystery fans is *Mysterious Visions* (St. Martin's, $12.95), edited by Martin Greenberg, Joseph Olander, and Charles Waugh. A collection of science-fiction stories by writers best known for their mystery fiction, it includes such giants of the crime world as Agatha Christie, John Dickson Carr, Arthur Conan Doyle, Mickey Spillane, John D. MacDonald, Cornell Woolrich, and Stanley Ellin. Isaac Asimov provides an amusing (if somewhat unrelated) introduction.

REPRINTS: As long as we are throwing accolades to St. Martin's Press, it is appropriate to note that its enormous number of hardcover mystery-fiction titles is now being augmented by a new line of large-format paperback reprints. Under the general title of "SMP Mystery Shelf Selections," the first three volumes are very British and very good: *Murder with Malice* by Michael Underwood ($2.95), *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn* by Colin Dexter ($3.50), and *Scared to Death* by Anne Morice ($2.95). How wonderful to have a whole new line of mystery books available.

And speaking of which, it should be further noted that St. Martin's is not alone in its commendable policy. Scribners has also decided to try a series of large-format paperback reprints, including the long out of print Philo Vance novel, *The "Canary" Murder Case* by S. S. Van Dine. And both Bantam and the newly merged Berkley and Jove publishing house are seriously committed to expanding their mystery lists. Not to mention Penguin, which for many, many months has been publishing Penguin Crime Classics in addition to its regular selection of mystery titles. All in all, it's a good time to be a mystery-fiction aficionado, as the range of choices grows and grows.

RESPECT: For all who love Solar Pons, the Praed Street Irregulars, and, of course, their creator, August Derleth, an organization was formed in 1977 to honor that popular and prolific writer. In November of that year, the first issue of the August Derleth Society's *Newsletter* was published. and it is flourishing under the editorial direction of Richard Fawcett. Should you wish to subscribe to the *Newsletter,* the annual cost is only $1.00, and a check should be sent to Mr. Fawcett at 61 Teecomwas Drive, Uncasville, CO 06382. Included are such esoterica as letters from Robert Bloch and Jesse Stuart, photographs of Derleth's grave site, poetry, tributes, and reminiscences. Even better than only the *Newsletter* is a membership in the Society, which costs $3.00 and includes a subscription to the *Newsletter.* The President of the Society, which plans to have permanent headquarters housing a comprehensive archive collection

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of Derleth material, is Gerald Heideman.

RIDICULOUS: It just has to be mentioned. Michael Palin and Terry Jones, two of the six members of Monty Python's Flying Circus comedy group, have collaborated on *Ripping Yarns* (Pantheon, $5.95, paper), a collection of six strange spoofs of various adventure-thriller-mystery tales. The scripts of a miniseries broadcast on PBS television, *Ripping Yarns* includes the heavily illustrated "Murder at Moorstones Manor," which suggests that the authors have read a good deal of Agatha Christie.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

French *flic* flicks have upheld a tradition of gritty realism since the days of the early Jean Gabin films, a tradition ably enforced by tough, middle-aged Lino Ventura in *The French Detective,* the best police drama yet this year. Ventura is a dedicated Chief Inspector in the large provincial city of Rouen; during an election campaign a cop is shot dead when hoodlums terrorize a group of workers hanging posters at night. Our cynical hero is certain there is a link between the killer (who has been identified as an ex-con) and the charming, ambitious and totally merciless young politician who seems to have won over most of the voters of the town. Ventura feels that the dividing line between politicians and gangsters can sometimes disappear. Suddenly, the policeman finds himself "kicked upstairs" — transferred to a higher post in another city where he can do no harm.

So determined are our policeman and his swaggering, devoted assistant (Patrick Dewaere) to remain in Rouen they even trump up a charge of bribery against themselves—so they can be frozen in their present assignments and finish the case. When finally the ex-convict is trapped in close proximity to the politician, Ventura makes a decision of such ironic justice audiences exult in its rightness.

The French Detective is not, however, darkly, somberly political but an often boisterous, swift, and expert thriller (directed by Pierre Granier-Deferre), laced with humor and real as life—all about the hard-nosed determination of a very professional cop.

Australian director Peter Weir has developed an international reputation for strange films of brooding, formless terror. His *Picnic at Hanging Rock,* made a few years ago, has finally been released in this country; it tells the supposedly true story of some

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schoolgirls in 1900 who disappear while on a summer's-day outing to the rugged, primitive rock terrain of the Australian bush. One girl is later found, too bruised and in shock to remember anything; the others were never seen again. The film gives no clear-cut explanation of what happens to the missing girls but closes on a haunting note of dark, shivery mystery.

Weir's more recent *The Last Wave* tells of a young Sydney barrister (Richard Chamberlain), hired to defend an aborigine accused of murder, who is pulled into a feverish vision of ritual death and the coming end of the world. He cannot escape this lashing, tormenting dream until finally he acts upon it. Peter Weir is currently so "hot" he is talking with Warner's about directing his first American film; let's hope he's not driven into becoming more commercial and less disturbing.

The recent 1979 Los Angeles International Film Exposition (Filmex) held in Century City not only treated its members with such "Misappreciated American Films" as *Beat the Devil, Pulp,* and *The Last of Sheila,* it devoted its final weekend — from Friday night through Sunday—to a marathon "50 Hours of Murder and Mystery." More than thirty features, from *The Thin Man* to *The Third Man,* from Alfred Hitchcock to Sherlock Holmes, from Philip Marlowe to Sam Spade, from *Laura* to the rarely seen, chilling *Peeping Tom,* were screened nonstop. Most of the audience made sure of seats by lining up outside the theater the night before, bringing such supplies as several days' worth of food and alarm clocks. "Just the cream," said Filmex of the marathon, "a total gluttonous feast of mystery and suspense."

Let us at that table.

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

In recent years, Dorothy B. Hughes' main contributions to the mystery field have been as a book reviewer and a biographer of Erle Stanley Gardner. But in the 1940s, she was one of the best and most celebrated American crime novelists.

In 1978, she was honored (along with Ngaio Marsh and Daphne DuMaurier) with the Mystery Writers of America's Grand Master Award, and now Bantam is bringing many of her novels back into print in paperback ($1.95 each).

Ride the Pink Horse (1946), set in Santa Fe at carnival time, and *In a Lonely Place* (1947), set in Southern California and involving the search for a serial killer of young women, are both beauti-

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fully told, rich in characterization and brooding atmosphere. They are full-bodied in a way that is rare among today's novels, especially those intended for (or springing from) movies. The first two books in this reprint series should create a new generation of Hughes fans.

Though its author is undeniably a mystery or crime novelist, it is necessary to stretch a point somewhat to review the best of this month's new novels in a mystery magazine. The point is worth stretching. Though arguably outside our field, the novel has some crime, a touch of mystery, and enough suspense and intrigue to satisfy any reader.

**** William P. McGivern: *Soldiers of '44,* Arbor House, $10.95. Drawn in part from the author's own experience in the Battle of the Bulge, this is a sensitive, knowledgeable, totally readable novel of men at war. The book has everything a war novel should: action, heroism, horror, ambiguity, moral and ethical questioning; a sense of the contradictions and absurdities of war as well as the tactics and the bravery.

*** Robert Bloch: *Such Stuff As Screams Are Made Of,* Del Rey-Ballantine, $1.95.

*** Robert Bloch: *Out of the Mouths of Graves,* Mysterious Press, $10.00.

The first question about a new Bloch collection is not so much whether the stories are good—for, of course, they are — but rather how many of them have already appeared in previous Bloch collections. At least 13 of the 21 stories in SSASAMO are recycled. OOTMOG scores somewhat better, with at least 5 repeats out of 16. One tale, "Lucy Comes to Stay," appears in both collections. OOTMOG puts more emphasis on straight crime stories, while SSASAMO leans toward horror-fantasy. The final tale in OOTMOG, "The Closer of the Way," is a delightful combination of self-analysis and intentional self-parody.

*** Mignon G. Eberhart: *The Bayou Road,* Random House, $8.95. Like EQ, Eberhart is celebrating her fiftieth anniversary between hard covers. Her latest is a story of murder and espionage in occupied New Orleans, a romantic Civil War thriller that calls to mind William Gillette's play, *Secret Service.* The old-fashioned moustache-twirling melodrama is successfully played with an absolutely straight face. Only the revelation of the murderer is a disappointment.

*** Stanley Ellin: *Star Light, Star Bright,* Random House, $8.95. In a lighter mood than usual, Ellin makes a rare foray into the private-eye mystery. The people are vivid, the plot is nicely complicated, the telling (as always) splendid. Though the tale is set in contemporary Florida, it is must reading for Jack the Ripper buffs, who won't know why until page 131.

*** Peter O'Donnell: *Dragon's Claw,* Souvenir Press (U.S. distributor: ISBS Inc., P.O. Box 555, Forest Grove, OR 97116), $9.95.

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Starring Modesty Blaise, who began life as a comic-strip character and is probably the best-known female rival of James Bond, this longish but fast-reading thriller features as colorful, kinky, and despicable a crew of villains as any reader nostalgic for Goldfinger and Dr. No could possibly hope for.

*** Penelope Fitzgerald: *The Golden Child,* Scribners, $7.95. Fans of Michael Innes and Edmund Crispin should enjoy this wild and droll satire on the recent worldwide enthusiasm for the traveling King Tut exhibit. As would be expected from a niece of Golden Age puzzle-spinner and rule-maker Father Ronald Knox, there is also a good if far-fetched mystery plot. Highest marks go to wit and quotability, though.

*** Margaret Yorke: *The Come-On,* Harper and Row, $8.95. The abused term "novel of suspense" applies perfectly here. The nature of the menace and the identity of the criminal are known throughout, and the principal interest of the story is the danger to the protagonist and how (or whether) she will successfully elude it. This type of crime novel may be one of the hardest to bring off successfully, however easy it may look. Yorke, who has done detective novels in the past, turns to pure suspense with admirable results.

*** Michael P. Hodel and Sean Wright: *Enter the Lion,* Hawthorn, $9.95. The latest ersatz Sherlock Holmes adventure, set in pre-Watson days and narrated by brother Mycroft, is an honorable effort, though slow-moving and overdetailed, with much not-quite-digested 19th Century history. The novel's saving grace is that it is obviously motivated by a genuine love for the canon, not merely by a desire to cash in on a trend that should (I hope) begin to wane any day now.

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DETECTIVERSE

APPETITE FOR FOUL PLAY

by MARK GRENIER

The mark's perplexed, the swindler skilled,
The Widowers thoroughly hooked.
By evening's end a pigeon's grilled,
And a miscreant's goose is cooked.

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THE SLOW GALLOWS, by Whit Masterson. Dodd, Mead, $7.95.

Whit Masterson's chilling new novel revolves around the fates of five people—a professor of wildlife biology, a beautiful graduate student, a pilot, a chief investigator for the county attorney of San Diego, and a powerful leader in organized labor convicted of a cold-blooded murder and accused of embezzling seventeen million dollars—whose paths cross with catastrophic consequences for all of them.

"Hair-trigger tensions will keep readers breathless as they follow the action in veteran Masterson's new thriller . . . [His] expert story screams to a climax."—*Publishers Weekly.*

"Fast-paced suspense . . ."—*ALA Booklist.*

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a *NEW* short story by

HENRY SLESAR

Dennison was a life-insurance salesman. But we all tend to forget—or strive hard to forget—that life insurance is really misnamed . . .

THE KINDEST MAN IN THE WORLD

by HENRY SLESAR

"Fifty-nine, uh-huh," Dennison said, giving the lock of his briefcase a firm, satisfying snap. "Well, it's not an age we write many policies for, Mr. Lewis, but that doesn't mean we don't *want* to. There's no such thing as being too old—or too young—for life insurance. So let's review what kind of protection you have, and how much more you might need to provide for your family."

Dennison took the fountain pen out of his pocket and gave the gold tip a delicate, adjusting twist. "Never used a ballpoint in my life," he smiled. Then he realized how insipid that sounded, and felt a flush of self-directed anger. He said, "Would the beneficiary be your wife?"

The man in the bathrobe, seated almost at the opposite wall of the hotel room, lifted his thin arms inside the tubular sleeves, and yawned. In the dim light he resembled some kind of monstrous bird, a cormorant about to begin a slow deliberate flight across the gray carpet.

"No," he said, with a birdlike grin. "I don't have a wife. I don't have any family at all."

Dennison sighed, having expected nothing. The call had come in cold to the office on Las Palmas, and the caller had asked for Dennison by name. Dennison, in bondage to a sullen mood that resulted from a miserable sales month, hadn't bothered to wonder why, or

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what made a hotel transient interested in the permanency of life insurance.

"That's right," the man in the bathrobe said. "Neither chick nor child, nobody I give a hang about."

"I see," Dennison said, not seeing at all. "Then the purpose of this policy would be—?"

"I never said I *wanted* a policy, did I?"

"The message I received at the office—"

"Was that I wanted to see *you*. Joe Dennison. You."

A familiar, scratchy ball of irritation rose in Dennison's throat, and he squinted in search of comprehension.

"Why, you don't even remember me," Lewis chuckled. "That's salt in the wound, Joe. It's not even eight years, and you don't remember me."

"All right," Dennison said flatly. "I give up. Who the hell are you?"

"Joe, you may not believe this, but I'm the kindest man in the world. I've come three thousand miles just to do you a kindness. I thought I'd lost track of you for good when you left home—whatever made you do that, Joe?—but then a friend of mine, a private detective it so happens, found you right smack in the middle of Los Angeles, selling life insurance. Insurance! That's a good joke on me, isn't it? Maybe if Nettie had an insurance policy with your company, maybe you wouldn't have killed her. Is that possible, Joe?"

The man in the bathrobe interlocked his fingers, placed them on his lap, and waited.

Finally Dennison said, "You're Wilfred Covey."

"Yes, that's right. Sorry I had to fool you into coming here, Joe, but I didn't see any other way. I wanted things to be different between us now. You see, I'm not angry any more, not in the least." He rose slowly from the chair and shuffled across the carpet, his bony hand extended. "Will you shake my hand, Joe? Will you do that?"

Dennison looked at the hand in loathing. Then he grasped it firmly, almost belligerently, and pumped it once.

"There," Covey chuckled. "That wasn't so bad, was it? I told you I came to do you a kindness, Joe, and that's what I meant. I want to help you the way I helped the others."

"The others?"

"Yes. Fowler and Phil Hepplewhite and Wally Waldron. You see, I forgave them, too, a long time ago, and I went out of my way to

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make things up to them, to show them I didn't harbor any bad feelings for what they did. For killing Nettie, I mean."

Dennison's lips moved numbly. Fowler, Hepplewhite, Waldron. He hadn't heard their names in years, not since his family troubles had driven him from New York.

"All right," he said. "I'm glad you've forgiven us, Mr. Covey. Only now I really have to be—"

"Wait a minute, Joe, please. Don't you want to hear *how* I forgave them? It's very important, really. You see, I want to be equally kind to you, but you'll have to help me. You'll have to show me how."

Dennison frowned at the briefcase on his lap. "I can't stay long," he said.

"Of course, I was ten years younger," Covey said. "Funny what a difference ten years can make. I was nearly fifty, but I felt like a spring chicken most of the time. That was the effect Nettie had on me. She was thirty-one, thirty-two, I was never sure which—Nettie was always coy about birthdays. I wish you might have known her, Joe—alive I mean. There was so much life in Nettie it spilled out of her eyes and mouth from morning to night. In any one day Nettie could run up and down the emotional scale like Paderewski on a keyboard. She wasn't the easiest woman to live with. But she is a lot harder to live without.

"We were married only two years when I bought the lake house. Things were going better for me that year—my little company was getting to be a big company. Nettie wanted me to accept the offers I was getting, to sell the business and spend the rest of our life tramping around the world and finding things to laugh about. How that girl loved to laugh! I wasn't quite ready for retirement yet, but I did buy that lake house. That little sailboat of Nettie's, that was a birthday present. I don't know which birthday, exactly, because Nettie was always coy about—but I've already said that, haven't I?

"God knows what made her think she was a sailor. When we took the boat out together, she'd sit all huddled up with delighted terror and hardly move until we were back on shore. Only that day—*you* know which day I mean, Joe—she just got carried away by the beauty of the weather and the glassy stillness of the lake, and she went out all by herself. I guess she made a pretty picture, all right, that long blonde hair of hers streaming out behind her, I guess you fellows must have been drawn to that like moths.

"You know what I really think? I think Nettie most probably saw

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the four of you cruising along in that nifty little power boat of yours. I think the sight of four men in a lipstick-red Chris Craft must have stirred up the flirt in her. So you see, I don't entirely blame you for what happened.

"The trouble was, Nettie just couldn't handle that boat. When you came gunning towards her, laughing and yelling, full of the devil, and your wake started to make her little sailboat bob like a cork, Nettie just lost her head. Maybe you didn't even see when she fell overboard—that's what you said at the inquest, wasn't it? Even if you did see her fall overboard, you must have figured she was perfectly okay, that she could just hold on to the hull and climb back on. Only you didn't even come back to find out, did you, Joe? You and the others. You just left her there, in the water.

"Nobody knows for sure what happened, whether she bumped her head when she went over and became unconscious. God, I'd want to think it happened that way, quick, because Nettie hated pain of any kind—she broke dental appointments, cried over hangnails, ate aspirin like peanuts when she had a headache. I hate to think of her suffering, with water in her lungs, her mouth filling up, stopping her cries. I was sixty miles away, in the noisy city, but you know, I could swear I heard her calling for help.

"Well, I guess you know how bad I was, Joe. The things I said, the threats I made! When I think of your faces at the inquest, like four tombstones! I suppose you were mighty relieved at the verdict, even if I did carry on like a fool. You know I didn't mean what I said, Joe. You ask anybody, my associates, my customers, even my competitors, they'll tell you what a kindly person I really am.

"After a while I calmed down. I thought things over and realized how wrong I was to blame Nettie's death on you and the others. Eventually I even began feeling *guilty* about the way I had carried on. But I really didn't know what to do about it, to make things up, I mean, until the day I ran across Fowler at the River City Club.

"It was over a year since Nettie died, and it was odd how I had trouble remembering exactly what Nettie looked like, but I didn't have any trouble at all recognizing Fowler. There he was, wearing a nice linen jacket, pretty girl on his arm, looking prosperous, a little jowly, and full of life. Full of whiskey, too, I couldn't help noticing that. Guess you know about Fowler, the trouble he had with drink. I didn't know how bad it was, not until he passed out on the dance floor and had to be carted off by the waiters.

"I felt sorry for the poor girl he was with, so I went over to help.

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She was a nice girl, sweet little post-deb named Louise, not much on brains, but she had green eyes like Nettie's, and that was enough of a recommendation for me.

"It was Louise who told me how serious Fowler's drink problem was. The poor guy considered himself a connoisseur of wines and liquors and maybe he was—he sure spent enough time and money for the stuff. The only trouble was, his income had taken a serious nose dive. The brokerage house he worked for didn't think drunks made the best account executives, not even connoisseur drunks. He'd been getting along on invitations to dinner parties and weekends, but his drinking was costing him friends, too. Pretty soon the jobs and the invitations and his health were all going to disappear—and what would happen to poor Fowler then?

"Well, I was sorry to hear all this, and the first question I asked myself was, how can I show him some kindness?

"About two weeks later I found out where and how Fowler was living—that was my detective friend at work. It was rather sordid, I'm afraid, a cheap one-room flat in a rundown section of the city. But I was happy to learn that Louise was having a good influence on the man. They had become engaged to be married, and the prime condition she had imposed on him was total abstinence.

"Well, it's wonderful what the love of a good woman can do for us reprobates, eh? For over six weeks Fowler behaved admirably, soberly, and even industriously. He found himself another job and was well on the road to dull, middle-class respectability. What a pity!

"There seemed to be only one thing I could do to help him under the circumstances, to spare him from the humdrum future that loomed ahead. I decided to become his secret benefactor, and I began with a gift worthy of any connoisseur—a bottle of Justerini & Brooks 1875 Cognac. Perhaps you don't know cognac? This was a great brandy bottled in honor of the coronation of some king or other. Unquestionably a collector's item, and I knew that a collector like Fowler would appreciate it, really appreciate it.

"I'm sorry to say that he appreciated it just a little too much. Louise was close to breaking their engagement when she found him in his unfortunate condition. But faced with the possibility of losing her, Fowler was repentant, and made staunch promises of sobriety.

"I then sent him a case of Chateau Mouton-Rothschild, 1955, that fine vintage which becomes rarer and rarer. Surely there was nothing wrong with a good red wine? To be enjoyed at mealtimes? Sadly

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enough, Louise didn't understand this any better, and poor Fowler had the grim duty of disposing of the lot. Almost the lot—I have a sneaky feeling he managed to hide one or two bottles.

"At any rate, I thought he merited an award for his good conduct, so I sent him a fine Scotch whiskey called the 'Glenlivet,' and I believe he enjoyed that very much. Then, in quick order, I sent him a Marc Marquis d'Angerville, vintage 1924, an Armagnac Domaine Boingneres, a case of Chateau Cheval Blanc and another of Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese, 1959, and then—Oh, yes. Louise. She finally left him, of course, and perhaps that was for the best. The girl was becoming an absolutely pernicious influence. I celebrated that event by sending Fowler champagne, a bottle of Louis Roederer Cristal Brut 1955.

"It was a pity that Fowler eventually lost even his meager quarters. It became hard to send him presents when he lost his permanent address and started wandering those filthy streets downtown. You can imagine how sad I was to learn of his illness—pneumonia, I'm told it was—and his subsequent death. His parents came all the way from Wisconsin for the funeral. It was a small quiet affair, and I was sorry that business kept me away. However, I sent flowers.

"I didn't wait to stumble on Phil Hepplewhite, now that I realized how much kindness could accomplish. I went out and found him.

"I knew from the very first report that Phil wasn't going to be an easy man to help—he seemed to have everything. He was a partner in a successful firm engaged in the manufacture of sunglasses. He was personable, even handsome, well educated, and of good disposition. And wonder on wonder, he was also a very happily married man. I was certainly pleased to hear that, Joe—you know my views on marriage.

"Six months before, he had wed a charming creature named Linda Fisher. She had been a secretary at the Hepplewhite company, a firm which employed many young women in its various departments. His marriage came as something of a surprise, because Phil, as you probably know, had a reputation for being a gay dog. Beautiful women had always been his weakness, and Linda was the loveliest he had met to date.

"In a way it was a shame he had rushed into marriage at the tender age of—what was he, twenty-five? I hadn't married until I was past forty, when a man is truly ready to devote himself to one woman alone. If physical beauty had been Phil's only standard, then

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he had simply underestimated the wealth of it available. I thought I would do him the kindness of showing him.

"The first young lady I sent to the Hepplewhite office was named Donna de Vrees, and believe it or not, she had actually taken a secretarial course at one time and was equipped for the job. This was surprising, since Miss de Vrees had been gathering laurels for her pretty head since the age of fifteen. She was Miss Everything for a while, then a favorite of photographers hired to glorify undergarments, and most recently, a striking addition to a musical revue which folded after three performances.

"She was hired for the job, and I'm afraid the inevitable happened. After two months Phil became painfully aware of the contrast between Linda's hair-curlered, face-creamed, sallow morning appearance and Donna's fresh-blooming, well-groomed, perfumed loveliness. Phil began working late and, naturally, so did Donna. The culmination was a domestic quarrel, and sobs, and packed luggage. Phil was repentant, and convincing enough to bring about a reconciliation. He discharged Donna, from both her job and his affection, and swore to be true forever.

"That was when I sent Tracey.

"Tracey was even more beautiful than Donna de Vrees. She had a face so exquisite that the only magazines in America able to resist her cover-girl charms were *National Geographic, Popular Mechanics*, and a handful more. The rest featured it over and over, so it had become too familiar for Tracey to pretend secretarial aspirations. I devised another form of introduction, simple but effective.

"Tracey went to see Mr. Hepplewhite on the pretext of wanting to model his sunglasses. He referred her to his advertising agency, but a lunch date resulted. The rest was—well, history is a good word. Don't they say that history repeats itself?

"It took two months before Linda became aware of Phil's new interest, and when she did, nothing satisfied her except a legal separation—the lawyers prospered. A few months after, there was still another reconciliation. Tracey was retired to Palm Beach, where she lived for a year on Phil's generous parting gift, and Linda was once more queen bee of the Hepplewhite hive.

"So I sent Ilona.

"Ilona wasn't as chic as Donna de Vrees, her clothes weren't as smart, and her hair wasn't done nearly as well. She wasn't as beautiful as Tracey. Her hair and her eyes were too black, her lips too

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full, her figure was perhaps too voluptuous. But she walked into Phil Hepplewhite's life, and this time Linda's domestic felicity was ended, but good. Linda carried on like all the Macbeth witches rolled into one. And when Phil finally moved out, bag and baggage, she went a bit further than most scorned wives do, and shot him in the middle of the lower back.

"You mean you hadn't heard, Joe? Yes, poor Phil's marriage ended in tragedy. No, he wasn't killed, luckily. The bullets made a mess of his spine, and cost him a kidney; he became a helpless paralytic, a permanent invalid, but he's alive. Isn't modern surgery wonderful? I understand Phil tried to undo the doctors' good work once or twice by slashing his wrists, but thank heavens, he's still with us. I send him a Christmas card every year.

"Poor Wally Waldron. You knew *he* was dead, of course.

"Heart attack? Excuse me for laughing, Joe, I shouldn't laugh at something like that, I know. Yes, I suppose you could call it a heart stoppage—that's the way we all end, isn't it? But there's more to the story than that.

"You see, when I located Wally Waldron at last, I knew at once the direction my kindness should take. It was very much like the case of poor Fowler—the man put his weakness on public display.

"I found him in Las Vegas.

"You know what the psychologists say about compulsive gamblers, don't you? They say gamblers are rolling those dice and placing those chips all for the sake of Love. Every time they place a bet, they're asking Fate to love them. It all sounds strange to me, but so they say.

"I guess Wally was badly in need of love, because he was a compulsive craps-shooter if ever there was one. By the time I caught up with him, he had used up every last drop of credit and good will he could find in the state of Nevada, and was heading back east. All he had left in the world was that log cabin by the lake, and his lipstick-red Chris Craft, both a legacy from a doting uncle.

"He sold the house, and the boat, to a man named Edwards, for the sum of six thousand dollars. That was my first act of kindness to Wally, because Edwards was acting in my behalf. I haven't done anything about the log cabin, but I've burned and scuttled the boat, Joe. I suppose that was childish of me, but I wanted to do that.

"It was interesting to see how fast Wally went through that money. My private detective friend had a hard time keeping up with his attempts to get rid of it. Half went to the parimutuels, the rest to

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private parties who held floating crap games in basements and garages around the city. It took about six weeks, all in all, at the rate of a thousand a week, until there wasn't any left. Not a nickel.

"Then I knew how I could be kind to Wally. Not by giving him large amounts of money to squander. But by small donations, to see him through these difficult days.

"I sent him a hundred dollars, in cash, one day. My detective friend reported his utter consternation when it arrived in the mail. Wally's closest friend was named Webber who ran a bookshop—and a book—on Canal Street. Wally ran to Webber's apartment to boast of his mysterious good fortune. Webber, a sardonic young man with a serious spinal curvature and a bent outlook on the world, probably warned him to beware of Trojan horses, but Wally laughed and paid no heed.

"He lost the hundred at the crap table that night, in less than half an hour of play.

"The next day, he found a fifty-dollar bill in the mail. It was marvelous the way his spirits lifted. In fact, he was so exhilarated that he spent the fifty on groceries and liquor, and brought them all to Webber's apartment for a celebration. They ate and drank and laughed like two college students on a dormitory binge, and Wally even made the announcement that he was giving up gambling and seeking steady employment. Or so I surmise, for Wally went to an employment bureau the following day and embarked on a round of job interviews.

"Then I sent him two hundred dollars, and he was back at the garage. He won that night, several hundred dollars more, and he returned the following evening to double that. It was a hot streak. Fate loved him. He was three or four thousand to the good by the end of the week, and ready for wider horizons. He found one, finally—an invitation to Rich Eddie's green-velvet private game in back of the kitchen at the Hotel Salud.

"My detective friend had many interesting stories to tell me about Rich Eddie, a throwback to the days when Muscle was king. I shudder to think of our friend Wally at the same table with so violent a man.

"Nevertheless, he accepted the invitation and brought his money with him. He also seemed to have brought his luck, because he emerged big winner of the night, with a total of about eight thousand dollars. Rich Eddie let him go without regrets, but insisted, politely, on a return engagement.

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"The next night Wally lost and lost badly. After six uninterrupted hours of play he was physically, spiritually, and financially exhausted. Humbly, tearfully, he begged for a stake, for a small loan to help him remain in action, and Rich Eddie was only too glad to oblige.

"Wally left the Hotel Salud five hundred dollars in debt to the gambler, and he was a worried man.

"I sent him the five hundred. Rich Eddie was so gratified at Wally's prompt payment that he extended his credit once more. This time Wally left owing four thousand dollars.

"By the weekend he owed Rich Eddie twelve thousand.

"Of course, I couldn't go on sending Wally money. Not if he was merely going to gamble it all away. You understand.

"It was pitiful to observe Wally waiting for the mailman every morning, expecting further postpaid miracles to get him out of trouble. Eventually the idea began to dawn on him that the money had stopped coming, and that if he intended to repay Rich Eddie he would have to find another way. Because Rich Eddie was becoming grossly impatient, and was discussing reprisal measures with Wally that were unpleasant and even dangerous.

"Two weeks after incurring the debt Wally realized that he would never be able to repay, and left his apartment in the middle of the night. He went to Webber's place, and asked the bookshop proprietor for sanctuary against Rich Eddie and his thugs. Webber agreed. He kept Wally sheltered, fed, and safe. But you know how it is with us good Samaritans, Joe. No matter how much kindness we offer people they resent our benevolence more than they feel gratitude.

"Wally, penned up in Webber's tiny flat, became nervous, edgy, irritable, hostile towards everything and everyone. Then one day he called Webber the one name that Webber despised and resented more than any other in the world. Coldly unforgiving, Webber stalked out of the apartment and went straight to Rich Eddie.

"Yes, you might say Wally died of a heart attack. A seizure, you might call it.

"I know what's on your mind, Joe. You're wondering about yourself.

"Well, Joe, it's this way. After Wally's death I asked my detective friend if he could locate you, too. All he could learn was that you had left the city, your parents' home, and your job, all very suddenly. And that was all he could find out.

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"Your trail was as cold as a bloodhound's nose, Joe. If you had been a professional criminal, you couldn't have done a better job of making a clean getaway. But I suppose that's why you did so well. There's nobody so hard to find as an amateur who wants to drop out of sight. You ask the Missing Persons Bureau if that isn't so.

"It was a long time before I finally caught up with you, Joe, before I finally located you here in L.A. But, Joe, I've been here a month now, and so has my detective friend, and neither one of us knows any more about you now than we did when we first arrived.

"Joe, will you tell me how I can help you? How can I be kind to you—like I was to the others?"

Joe Dennison stood up, his fingers aching from making clenched fists.

"Like the others?" he said.

"Yes," Covey said. "Just like them. To repay you for all those nasty things I said at the inquest, for all the unwarranted hatred I felt for you and them."

"You want to know my weakness. Is that it?"

"If you want to put it that way—"

"That's exactly what you mean, isn't it?" Dennison said, running short of breath. "Fowler was a drunkard—so you killed him with your damn 'gifts.' Phil Hepplewhite had a weakness for women. Wally for gambling—"

Covey gave him his cormorant's grin. "And yours, Joe? You want to tell me your weakness?"

Dennison came to Covey's chair and stood over it. He reached down and gathered handfuls of terrycloth, hauling the birdlike figure to its feet.

"You dirty murderer," he said, between his teeth. He gave the bathrobe a shake, and the thin body inside it flopped loosely.

"I'm trying to be kind," Covey said shakily. "The way you were kind to Nettie, Joe, you and the rest of them—"

"Killer," Joe Dennison said, and this time his hands found the bony shoulders. He shook harder, until Covey's head, delicately balanced on the thin reed of his neck, wobbled back and forth in a blur of pink flesh and dark startled eyes. "*Killer!*" Dennison shouted again, accelerating the movements of his hands like the pistons of a machine gathering momentum.

Suddenly Covey's bones seemed to melt, his body became soft, doll-like, and Dennison didn't even hear the strange snapping noises

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his joints were making; and Dennison was no more aware of the exact moment of Covey's death than he was aware of the exact time of day.

"About ten minutes to six," Lieutenant Miner said to the Inspector. "That was when Dennison came downstairs and told the desk clerk what had happened. The clerk put in a call to the precinct, and Dennison waited for us in the lobby."

"Cause of death?" the Inspector said.

"The man's neck was broken. But we're not going to have a hard time with this guy Dennison, Inspector. He's dictating his statement right now." Miner paused, and then added, "I can't help feeling sorry for him."

"Sorry? What for?"

"He seems decent. Says he never meant to kill this Covey, that he lost his head. Said the same kind of thing happened to him a few years back, when he struck his own father during a quarrel. He felt so bad about it, he left home, quit his job, and came out West."

"Um," the Inspector said sourly. "Is that your idea of a decent guy?"

"So he's hot-tempered," Miner said. "We've all got our weaknesses. Haven't we?"

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THE WINCHURCH AFFAIR

by **RUTH RENDELL**

(continued from page 52)

The parcel from Carlyon Brent, the publisher, arrived in the morning with a polite covering letter from Amyas Ireland, grateful in anticipation. Wexford had never before seen a book in this embryo stage. The typescript, about 100,000 words long, was bound in red, and through a window in its cover appeared the provisional title: *Poison at Paraleash. A Reappraisal of the Winchurch Case* by Kenneth Gandolph.

"Remember all that fuss about Gandolph?" Wexford said to Dora across the coffee pot. "About four years ago?"

"Somebody confessed a murder to him, didn't they?"

"Well, maybe. While a prison visitor, he spent some time talking to Paxton, the bank robber, in Wormwood Scrubs. Paxton died a few months later, and Gandolph then published an article in a newspaper in which he said that during the course of their conversations Paxton had confessed to him that he was the perpetrator of the Conyngford murder in 1962. Paxton's widow protested, there was a heated correspondence, MPs wanting the libel laws extended to libeling the dead, Gandolph shouting about the power of truth. Finally, the by then retired Detective Chief Superintendent Warren of Scotland Yard ended all further controversy by issuing a statement to the press. He said Paxton couldn't have killed James Conyngford because on the day of Conyngford's death in Brighton, Warren's sergeant and a constable had Paxton under constant surveillance in London. In other words, he was never out of their sight."

"Why would Gandolph invent such a story, Reg?" said Dora.

"Perhaps he didn't. Paxton may have spun him all sorts of tales as a way of passing a boring afternoon. Who knows? On the other hand, Gandolph does rather set himself up as the elucidator of unsolved crimes. Years ago I believe he did find a satisfactory and quite reasonable solution to some murder in Scotland, and maybe it went to his head. Marshall, Groves and Folliott used to be his publishers. I wonder if they've refused this one because of the Paxton business, if it was offered to them first and they turned it down."

"But Mr. Ireland's people have taken it," Dora pointed out.

"Mm-mm. But they're not falling over themselves with enthusi-

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asm, are they? They're scared. Ireland hasn't sent me this so I can check up on the police procedural part. What the hell do I know about police procedure in 1900? He's sent it to me in the hope that if Gandolph's been up to his old tricks I'll spot what they are."

The working day presented no opportunity for a look at *Poison at Paraleash*, but at eight o'clock that night Wexford opened the package and read Gandolph's long introduction. He found himself growing interested, then deeply fascinated. Gandolph began by writing that, as a criminologist, he had always been aware of the Winchurch case and of the doubt which many felt about Florence Winchurch's guilt. Therefore, when he was staying with friends in Boston, Massachusetts, some two years before and they spoke to him of an acquaintance of theirs who was the niece of one of the principals in the case, he had asked to be introduced to her. The niece was Ada Hurst's daughter Lina, still Miss Hurst, 74 years old and suffering from a terminal illness.

Miss Hurst showed no particular interest in the case. She had been brought up by her father and his second wife and had hardly known her uncle. All her mother's property had come into her possession, including the diary which Ada Fenton Hurst had kept for three years prior to Edward Winchurch's death. Lina Hurst told Gandolph she had kept the diary for sentimental reasons but that he might borrow it and after her death she would see he got it.

Within weeks Lina Hurst did die and her stepbrother, who was her executor, had the diary sent to Gandolph. He had read it carefully and had been enormously excited by certain entries because, in his view, they incriminated Frank Fenton and exonerated Florence Winchurch. Here Wexford turned back a few pages and noted the author's dedication: *In memory of Miss Lina Hurst, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, without whose help this reappraisal would have been impossible.*

More than this he had no time to read that evening, but he returned to it on the following day. The diary, it appeared, was a five-year one. At the top of each page was the date—for example, April 1—and beneath that five spaces each headed 18... There was room for the diarist to write perhaps 40 or 50 words in each space. On the January 1 page, in the number of the year, the 8 had been crossed out and a 9 substituted, and so it went on for every subsequent entry until March 6, after which no more entries were made until the diarist resumed in December 1900 by which time she and her brother were in Boston.

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Wexford proceeded to Gandolph's first chapters. The story he had to tell was substantially the same as F. Tennyson Jesse's, and it was not until he came to chapter five and the weeks preceding the crime that he began to concentrate on the character of Frank Fenton. He suggested that Fenton wanted Mrs. Winchurch for the money and property she would inherit on her husband's death. Far from encouraging Florence to seek a divorce, he urged her never to let her husband suspect her preference for another man. Divorce would have left Florence penniless and homeless and have ruined his career. Fenton had known that it was only by making away with Winchurch and so arranging things that the death appeared natural, that he could have Florence, the money, and his career.

There was only his word for it, said Gandolph, that he had spoken to Florence of botulism and had warned her against those particular canned herrings. Of course he had never seriously expected those cans to infect Winchurch, but that the fish should be eaten by him was necessary to his plans. On the night before Winchurch's death, after dining with his sister at Paraleash House, he had introduced strychnine into the port decanter. He had also, Gandolph suggested, contrived to bring the conversation round to a discussion of food and to fish dishes of which he would have said he was fond. From that it would have been a short step to get Winchurch to admit how much he had enjoyed *Filets de hareng marinés a la Rosette* and ask Florence to have them served again on the following day.

Wexford paused here, questioning the writer's assumptions. He didn't think it would have been a short step; to him it seemed that the difficulties of making a man put such a remote and haphazard request were nearly insuperable. But perhaps Gandolph was implying that Edward Winchurch, a mild and not very strong-willed man, had been easily led, and within a few more pages he understood that this was the implication. Edward, apparently, would have been highly likely to take his doctor's advice even when in health, even on such a matter as what he should eat for the fourth course of his dinner, while Edward's wife did everything her lover, if not her husband, told her to do.

It was no surprise to Frank Fenton to be called out on the following evening to a man whose spasms only he would recognize as symptomatic of having swallowed strychnine. The arrival of Dr. Waterfield was an unlooked-for circumstance. Once Winchurch's symptoms had been defined as arising from strychnine poisoning, there was nothing left for Fenton to do but shift the blame to his

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mistress. Gandolph suggested that Fenton attributed the source of the strychnine to Anstruther's chemist's shop out of revenge on Anstruther for calling in Waterfield and thus frustrating his own hopes.

And what grounds had Gandolph for believing all this? Certain entries in Ada Hurst's diary. Wexford read them slowly and carefully.

For February 27, 1900, she had written, filling the entire small space: *Very cold. Leg painful again today. FW sent round the carriage and had John drive me to Pomfret. Compton says rats in the cellars and old stables. Dined at home with F. F says rats carry leptospiral jaundice, must be got rid of.*

February 28: *Drove in FW's carriage to call on old Mrs. Paget. FW still there, having tea with F when I returned. I hope there is no harm in it. Dare I warn F?*

February 29: *F destroyed twenty rats with strychnine from his dispensary. What a relief!*

March 1: *Heard poor old Mrs. Paget passed away in the night. A merciful release. Compton complained about the rats again. Warmer this evening and raining.*

There was no entry for March 2.

March 3: *Annie gave notice, she is getting married. Shall be sorry to lose her. Would not go out in carriage for fear of leaving FW too much alone with F. To bed early as leg most painful.*

March 4: *My birthday. 26 today and an old maid now, I think. FW drove over, brought me beautiful Indian shawl. She is always kind. Invited F and me to dine tomorrow.*

There was no entry for March 5, and the last entry for nine months was the one for March 6: *Dined last night at Paraleash House, six guests besides ourselves and the W's. F left cigar case in the dining room, went back after seeing me home. I hope and pray there is no harm.*

Gandolph was evidently basing his case on the entries for February 29th and March 6th. In telling the court he had no strychnine in his dispensary, Fenton had told a lie. He had had an obvious opportunity for the introduction of strychnine into the decanter when he returned to Paraleash House to retrieve his cigar case, and when he no doubt took care that he entered the dining room alone.

The next day Wexford carefully reread the chapters in which the new information was contained and he studied with concentration

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the chapters concerning the diary. But unless Gandolph was simply lying about the existence of the diary and, or, of those two entries—something which he would hardly dare to do—there seemed no reason to differ from his inference. Florence Winchurch was innocent, Frank Fenton was the murderer of Edward. But Wexford wished Burden were there so that they might have one of their often acrimonious but always fruitful discussions. Somehow, with old Mike to argue against him and put up opposition, he felt things might have been better clarified.

And the morning brought news of Burden, if not of the inspector himself, in the form of a postcard from Agios Nikolaios. The blue Aegean, a rocky escarpment, green pines. Who but Burden, as Wexford remarked to Dora, would send postcards while on his honeymoon? The post also brought a parcel from Carlyon Brent. It contained books, a selection from the publishing house's current list as a present for Wexford, and on a compliments slip accompanying them, a note from Amyas Ireland. *I shall be in Kingsmarkham with my people at the weekend. Can we meet? AI*

The books were the latest novel about Regency London—*The Golden Reticule*, by Camilla Barnet; *Put Money in Thy Purse*, the biography of Vassili Vandrian, the financier; the memoirs of Sofya Bolkonska, Bolshoi ballerina; an omnibus version of three novels of farming life by Giles de Coverley; the *Cosmos Book of Stars and Calendars*; and Vernon Trevor's short stories, *Raise Me Up Samuel*. Wexford wondered if he would ever have time to read them, but he enjoyed looking at them, their handsome glossy jackets, and smelling the civilized, aromatic, slightly acrid print smell of them. At ten he phoned Amyas Ireland, thanked him for the present, and said he felt reasonably—well, thoroughly really—satisfied about Gandolph's book.

"But we can talk about it?"

"Sure. I'll be here all Saturday and Sunday."

"Let me take you and Mrs. Wexford out to dinner on Saturday night," said Ireland.

But Dora refused. She would be an embarrassment to both of them, she said; they could have their talk much better without her, and she could spend the evening at home having a shot at making a coil pot on her own. So Wexford went alone to meet Ireland in the bar of the Olive and Dove.

"I suppose," Wexford said, accepting a glass of Moselle, "that we can dispense with the fiction that you wanted me to read *Poison at*

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Paraleash to check on police methods and court procedure? Not to put too fine a point on it, you were afraid that Gandolph might be up to his old tricks again."

"Oh, well now, come," said Ireland. He seemed thinner than ever. He looked about him, he looked at Wexford, made a face, wrinkling up nose and mouth. "Well, if you must put it like that—yes."

"There may not have been any tricks, though, may there? Paxton couldn't have murdered James Conyngford, but that doesn't mean he didn't tell Gandolph he did murder him. Certainly the people who give Gandolph information seem to die very conveniently soon afterwards. He picks on the dying—first Paxton, then Lina Hurst. I suppose you've seen this diary?"

"Oh, yes. We shall be using reproductions of the two relevant pages."

"No possibility of forgery?"

Ireland looked unhappy. "Ada Hurst wrote a very stylized hand, what's called a *Ronde* hand, which she had obviously taught herself. It would be easy to forge. Shall I submit it to a handwriting expert?"

"I think it's genuine." As Ireland's face grew less anxious, Wexford continued to comfort him. "I take it that it was not unusual for Ada Hurst to leave blanks as she did for March second and March fifth?"

Ireland nodded. "Quite usual. Every month there were half a dozen days on which she made no entries." A waiter came up to them with two large menus. "I'll have the *bouillabaisse* and the lamb *en croute* and the *medaillon* potatoes and French beans," said Ireland.

"*Consommé* and then the Parma ham," said Wexford austerely. When the waiter had gone he grinned at Ireland. "Pity they don't do *Filets de hareng a la Rosette*. It might have provided us with the authentic atmosphere." He was silent for a moment, savoring the delicate tangy wine. "I take it," he said, "that you've checked that 1900 genuinely was a Leap Year?"

"All first years of a century are."

Wexford considered, thought about it. "Yes, of course, all years divisible by four are Leap Years."

"I must say it's a great relief to me you're so happy about it."

"I wouldn't quite say that," said Wexford.

They went into the dining room and were shown, at Ireland's request, to a sheltered corner table. A waiter brought a bottle of

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Chateau de Portets 1973. Wexford looked at the basket of rolls, croissants, little plump brioches, miniature wholemeal loaves, and Italian sticks; he swallowed his desire and refused with an abrupt shake of the head. Ireland took two croissants.

"What exactly do you mean?" he said.

"It strikes me as being odd," said the chief inspector, "that in the entry for February twenty-ninth Ada Hurst says that her brother destroyed twenty rats with strychnine, yet in the entry for March first that Compton, whom I take to be the gardener, is still complaining about the rats. Why wasn't he told how effective the strychnine had been? Hadn't he been taken into Fenton's confidence about the poisoning? Or was twenty only a very small percentage of the horde of rats which infested the place?"

"Right. It is odd. What else?"

"I don't know why, on March sixth, she mentions Fenton's returning for the cigar case. It wasn't interesting and she was limited for space. She doesn't record the name of a single guest at the dinner party, doesn't say what any of the women wore, but she carefully notes that her brother had left his cigar case in the Paraleash House dining room and had to go back for it. Why did she write that?"

"Oh, surely because by now she was nervous whenever Frank was alone with Florence."

"But he wouldn't have been alone with Florence. Winchurch would have been there." Wexford put forward his objection about Fenton's alleged manipulation of Winchurch to have the herring dish served to him on March 6th, and Ireland said he would mention this to Gandolph. They discussed the typescript throughout the meal, and later pored over it, Ireland with his brandy, Wexford with coffee. But the outcome was that the new facts were really new and, moreover, were sound, and that Carlyon Brent could safely publish the book in the spring.

Wexford got home to find Dora sitting with a wobbly looking half-finished coil pot beside her, and deep in the *Cosmos Book of Stars and Calendars*.

"Reg, did you know that for the Greeks the year began on Midsummer Day? And that the Chinese and Jewish calendars have twelve months in some years and thirteen in others?"

"I can't say I did."

"We avoid that, you see, by using the Gregorian Calendar and correct the error by making every fourth year a Leap Year. You really must read this book, it's fascinating."

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But Wexford's preference was for the Vassili Vandrian and the farming trilogy, though with little time to read he hadn't completed a single one of these works by the time Burden returned on the following Monday week. Burden had a fine even tan but for his nose which had peeled.

"Have a good time?" said Wexford with automatic politeness.

"What a question," said the inspector, "to ask a man who has just come back from his honeymoon. Of course I had a good time." He cautiously scratched his nose. "What have you been up to?"

"Seeing something of your brother-in-law. He got me to read a typescript."

"Ha!" said Burden. "I know what that was. He said something about it, but he knew Gandolph'd get short shrift from me. A devious liar if ever there was one. It beats me what sort of satisfaction a man can get out of the kind of fame that comes from foisting on the public stories he *knows* aren't true. All that about Paxton was a pack of lies, and I've no doubt he bases his new version of the Winchurch case on another pack of lies. He's not interested in the truth, he's only interested in being known as the great criminologist and the man who shows the police up for fools."

"Come on, Mike," said Wexford, "that's a bit sweeping. I told Ireland I thought it would be okay to go ahead and publish."

Burden's face wore an expression that was almost a caricature of sophisticated, scathing knowingness. "Well, of course I haven't seen it, so I can't say. I'm basing my objection to Gandolph on the Paxton affair. Paxton never confessed to any murder and Gandolph knows it."

"You can't say that for sure."

Burden sat down. He tapped his fist lightly on the corner of the desk. "I *can* say. I knew Paxton, you see. I knew him well."

"I didn't know that."

"No, it was years back, before I came here. In Eastbourne it was, when Paxton was with the Garfield gang. In the force down there we knew it was useless ever trying to get Paxton to talk. He *never* talked. I don't mean he just didn't give away any info, I mean he didn't answer when you spoke to him. Various times when we tried to interrogate him he just maintained this total silence.

"A mate of his told me years ago he'd made it a rule not to talk to policemen or social workers or lawyers or any what you might call establishment people, and he never had. He talked to his wife and his kids and his mates all right. But I remember once he was

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in the dock at Lewes Assizes and the judge addressed him. He just didn't answer, he wouldn't, and the judge—it was old Clydesdale—sent him down for contempt. So don't tell me Paxton made any sort of confession to Kenneth Gandolph, not *Paxton*."

The effect of all this was to reawaken all Wexford's former doubts. He trusted Burden, he had a high opinion of his opinion. It looked as if Gandolph had chosen Paxton as the Conyngford murderer because he knew the old lag never talked, never would defend himself, and was dying anyway. Had he chosen to falsify Ada Fenton Hurst's diary because Lina Hurst also hadn't long to live?

Wexford began to wish he had advised Ireland to have tests made to determine the age of the ink used in the February 29th and March 6th entries, or to have the writing examined by a handwriting expert. Yet if Ada Hurst had had a stylized hand self-taught in adulthood . . . what good were handwriting experts anyway? Not much, in his experience. And of course Ireland couldn't suggest to Gandolph that the ink be tested without offending the man to such an extent that he would refuse publication of *Poison at Paraleash* at Carlyon Brent.

But Wexford was suddenly certain that those two entries were false and that Gandolph had forged them. Very subtly and cunningly he had forged them, having judged and judged correctly, that the addition to the diary of just 34 words would alter the whole balance of the Winchurch case and shift the guilt from Florence to her lover.

Thirty-four words. Wexford had made a copy of the diary entries and now he looked at them again. February 29: *F destroyed twenty rats with strychnine from his dispensary. What a relief!* March 6: *F left cigar case in the dining room, went back after seeing me home. I hope and pray there is no harm.* There were no anachronisms—men certainly used cigar cases in 1900—no divergence from Ada's usual style. He could see no permissible way of proving forgery, so he tried to put the Winchurch case out of his mind and concentrate on *Put Money in Thy Purse*. The phone rang as he was getting into the last chapter. It was Jenny Burden. Would he and Dora come to dinner on Saturday? Her parents would be there, and her brother.

Wexford said Dora was out to her pottery class, but, yes, they would love to, and had she had a nice time in Crete?

"How *sweet* of you to ask," said the bride. "No one else has. Thank you, we had a lovely time."

He had meant it when he had said they would love to, but still

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he didn't feel very happy about meeting Amyas Ireland again. He had a feeling that once the book was published some as yet unimagined Warren or Burden would turn up and denounce it. When he saw Ireland again he ought to say, "Don't do it, don't take the risk. Publish and be damned can have another meaning than the popular one." But how to give such a warning with no sound reason for giving it, with nothing but one of those vague feelings, this time of foreboding, which had so assisted him yet run him into so much trouble in the past?

No, there was nothing he could do. He sighed, finished the last chapter of the Vandrian book, and moved on to the farmer's fictionalized memoirs.

Afterward Wexford was in the habit of saying that he got more reading done that week than he had in years. Perhaps it had been a way of escape from fretful thought. But certainly he had passed a freakishly slack week, getting home most nights by six. He even read Miss Camilla Barnet's *The Golden Reticule*. And by Friday night there was nothing left but the *Cosmos Book of Stars and Calendars*.

It was a large party, Mr. and Mrs. Ireland and their son, Burden's daughter Pat, his sister-in-law from his first marriage and her husband, and of course the Burdens themselves. Jenny's face glowed with happiness and Aegean sunshine. She welcomed the Wexfords with kisses and brought them drinks served in their own wedding present to her.

The meeting with Amyas Ireland wasn't the embarrassment Wexford had feared it would be—had feared, that is, up till a few minutes before he and Dora had left home. And now he knew that he couldn't contain himself till after dinner, till the morning, or perhaps worse than that—a phone call on Monday morning. He asked his hostess if she would think him very rude to want to speak to her brother alone for five minutes.

She laughed. "Not rude at all. I think you must have got the world's most wonderful idea for a crime novel and Ammy's going to publish it. But I don't know where to put you unless it's the kitchen. And you," she said to her brother, "are not to eat anything, mind."

"I couldn't wait," Wexford said as they found themselves stowed away into the kitchen where every surface was necessarily loaded with the constituents of dinner for ten people. "I only found out this evening at the last minute before we were due to come here."

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"It's something about the Winchurch book?"

Wexford said eagerly, "It's not too late, is it? I was worried it might be too late."

"Good God, no. We hadn't planned to start printing for a month." Ireland, who had seemed about to disobey his sister and help himself to a macaroon from a silver dish, suddenly lost his appetite. "This is serious?"

"Wait till you hear. I was waiting for my wife to finish dressing." Wexford grinned. "You should make it a rule to read your own books, you know. That's what I was doing, reading one of those books you sent me, and that's where I found it. You won't be able to publish *Poison at Paraleash*."

Wexford's smile went and he looked almost fierce. "I've no hesitation in saying that Kenneth Gandolph is a forger and a cheat and you'd be advised to have nothing to do with him in the future."

Ireland's eyes narrowed. "Better know it now than later. What did he do and how do you know?"

From his jacket pocket Wexford took the copy he had made of the diary entries. "I can't prove that the last entry, the one for March sixth that says, *F left his cigar case in the dining room, went back for it after seeing me home*—I can't prove that's forged. I only think it is. What I know for certain is that the entry for February twenty-ninth—that *is* a forgery."

"Isn't that the one about the strychnine?"

"F destroyed twenty rats with strychnine from his dispensary. What a relief!"

"How do you know it's forged?"

"Because the day itself didn't occur," said Wexford. "In 1900 there was no February twenty-ninth. It wasn't a Leap Year."

"Oh, yes, it was. We've been through all that before." Ireland's voice sounded both relieved and impatient. "All years divisible by four are Leap Years. All century years are divisible by four and 1900 was a century year. 1897 was the year she began the diary, following 1896 which was a Leap Year. Needless to say, there was no February twenty-ninth in 1897, 1898, or 1899—so there must have been one in 1900."

"It wasn't a Leap Year," said Wexford. "Didn't I tell you I found this out through that book of yours, the *Cosmos Book of Stars and Calendars*? There's a lot of useful information in there, and one of the bits of information is about how Pope Gregory composed a new civil calendar to correct the errors of the Julian Calendar. One of

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his rulings was that every fourth year should be a Leap Year except in certain cases—"

Ireland interrupted him. "I don't believe it!" he said in the tone of someone who knows he believes every word.

Wexford shrugged. He went on, "Century years were not to be Leap Years unless they were divisible not by four but by four hundred. Therefore, 1600 would have been a Leap Year if the Gregorian Calendar had by then been adopted, and 2000 will be a Leap Year, but 1800 was not and 1900 was not. So in 1900 there was no February twenty-ninth and Ada Hurst left the space on the page blank for the very good reason that the day following February twenty-eighth was March first. Unluckily for him, Gandolph, like you and me and most people, didn't know this—otherwise he would surely have inserted his strychnine entry into the blank space of March second and his forgery might never have been discovered."

Ireland slowly shook his head at man's ingenuity or perhaps his chicanery. "I'm very grateful to you. We should have looked fools, shouldn't we?"

"I'm glad Florence wasn't hanged in error," Wexford said as they went back to join the others. "Her marriage didn't begin with dearly beloved, but if she was afraid at the end it can't have been with any amazement."

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SOME DAYS ARE LIKE THAT

by *JACK RITCHIE*

I got the correct forms and returned to our desk. "What is this missing person's name?"

"Helmuth Pringle," Mrs. Watson said. "He's my brother and he lives with me and my husband." Mrs. Watson appeared to be in her middle forties.

Ralph watched me type the name and then went to one of the phones at another desk.

"How long has your brother been missing?" I asked.

"Since about seven last night."

It was now ten in the morning.

She continued, "Helmuth went for his walk like he always does after supper. And he usually comes back to the house by eight o'clock. But eight came and went and he didn't come home."

I elicited the further information that Helmuth was approximately five foot eight, had light brown hair, was 48 years old, and weighed 170 pounds.

"And when your brother did not return by eight, you began to worry?"

"Well, not too much right then. Once in a while he'll stop in somewhere for a few beers and forget the time. So I wasn't really too worried when I went to bed at ten thirty. Helmuth has a key and he could let himself in when he came back."

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"But he didn't come back?"

"No. This morning when I looked in his bedroom I saw that his bed hadn't even been slept in. And so I came to you."

Ralph returned to our desk. "I phoned County General Hospital and they don't have any Helmuth Pringle." He explained to Mrs. Watson: "That's where people are usually taken if they get injured in an auto accident or something like that."

"What is his Social Security number?" I asked.

She blinked. "Why in the world would you want that?"

"We may need it. People disappear, get jobs elsewhere, but usually they continue using their own names and paying their Social Security deductions. So naturally the Social Security office would have their new addresses."

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "I don't believe Helmuth ever had a Social Security number."

I was mildly surprised. "Nowadays just about everybody has a Social Security number. What is his occupation?"

"He's retired," she said quickly.

I glanced at the form again. It must be nice to be retired at 48. "Did he have any reason to leave? A quarrel, perhaps?"

"No. He was quite happy with us. And if he'd wanted to go somewhere, I'm certain he would have told us before he left."

I tried to be reassuring. "Perhaps he has a touch of amnesia. However, as soon as he remembers to look at his driver's license, he'll realize who he is and return home."

"He doesn't have a driver's license. He doesn't drive."

"Well, surely he must have some identification in his wallet. Credit cards?"

"He didn't believe in credit cards. At least not his own." She hesitated as though she had just said a little too much. "As a matter of fact, now that I think of it, I don't believe he ever carried a wallet. He just had a little green change purse where he kept a few folded bills and some change."

Ralph picked up the phone, this time at our desk, and dialed County General again.

When he hung up, he said, "Well, nobody unidentified has been taken to County General."

Mrs. Watson cleared her throat. "Well, it is *just* possible that he might have been carrying somebody else's wallet on his person."

"Why would he be carrying somebody else's wallet?" Ralph asked.

She was clearly uneasy. "Well, it just so happens that yesterday

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he found a wallet. On the street. And he told me that he was going to take it back to its owner. But maybe he forgot and he would still be carrying that wallet."

"Would you remember the name of the wallet's owner?" I asked.

"No. Helmuth didn't show it to me. He just said that he'd found it."

Ralph and I pondered that for half a minute and then I picked up the phone and dialed County General again. Ralph picked up the extension to listen.

When I made my connection, I said, "This is Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle of the Milwaukee Police Department. I would like to know if there was a male, age forty-eight, hair brown, height five foot eight, and weight a hundred and seventy pounds, brought in after seven last night?"

There was a brief silence while my connection was evidently consulting records. He returned to the phone. "We got one that nearly matches. Except that his age is forty-nine. He was brought in at about seven-thirty. D.O.A. A hit-and-run case. His name was Albert Hennessey and he came from Spoon Junction. That's a little town about a hundred miles northwest of here."

I had heard of it, of course. "Do you have the body there?"

"No. We kept it long enough to confirm that he was dead and then turned it over to you people. It's a police matter. He should be in your morgue right now."

I dialed our morgue downstairs and got Harry Schleigel, the attendent on duty, and asked about the body.

He confirmed the County General report. "Albert Hennessey. We picked him up at about ten last night."

"Have you got a list of his personal belongings?"

"Sure. Handkerchief, comb, wallet, change purse."

"What color is the change purse?"

"It doesn't say here."

"We'll be right down there and have a look at the body."

"It isn't here any more."

"Why not?"

"His niece had it picked up. We phoned her the bad news and she drove down, identified the body, and made arrangements to have it picked up. The Mathewson Funeral Home."

I was thoughtful. "Aren't they here in town?"

"Right. They picked up the body about an hour ago."

I hung up and turned to a pale Mrs. Watson. "Well, the body isn't

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that of your brother, after all. I'm sure he's probably quite well and he'll return in a matter of days or at least let you know where he is. Do you have any photographs of him?"

She produced several snapshots from her purse and turned them over to me.

Ralph and I watched her go.

Ordinarily, in the case of a missing person, we let time mend the problem. In the first place, disappearing is in itself not a crime—at least, in the police sense. And secondly, the majority of missing persons return home within two days, and 95 percent within seven days. Only a fraction of disappearances are longer or permanent. And fewer still become police problems.

"That's odd," I said.

Ralph properly asked, "What's odd?"

"This niece patronized a funeral home right here in the city."

"What's so odd about that? They'll probably ship the body back home to Spoon Junction."

"But wouldn't it be much simpler and less expensive to have a funeral director from Spoon Junction come down *here* to pick up the body and take it back to Spoon Junction?"

"It's the same distance back and forth, Henry, no matter who does the driving."

"Yes, but if the Mathewson Funeral Home takes the body up there, another funeral home would probably have to be involved in the actual burial, wouldn't it? I mean, surely it is a matter of funerary ethics. One funeral home simply does not conduct a burial in another's territory. So wouldn't it have been wiser for the Spoon Junction funeral director to take care of the transportation of the body *and* the burial?"

Ralph rubbed his jaw at my acute reasoning. "Maybe this niece was so rattled by her uncle's death that she wasn't thinking straight."

"Perhaps. But I rather suspect that an ethical funeral director would have pointed out the advantages of patronizing her local undertaker, and until further notice we will assume that all funeral directors are ethical."

I got up. "Let's go down to the morgue."

Downstairs, Harry Schleigel sat at the desk.

I came to the point. "Are you positive that this niece identified the body as that of her uncle, Albert Hennessey?"

He indicated the papers on his desk. "According to these, she did. But I wasn't on duty when she came here."

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"Who was?"

"Charley Thurston. He's on from midnight to eight A.M."

"Did you happen to get a look at the body when the funeral parlor people picked it up?"

"Sure."

I showed him the snapshots of Helmuth Pringle. "Do you recognize this man?"

Harry nodded. "That's the stiff you're talking about. Albert Hennessey. From Spoon Junction."

I smiled with restrained triumph. "He was not Albert Hennessey from Spoon Junction. He was Helmuth Pringle from Milwaukee. You said that Charley Thurston was on duty from midnight to eight? What's his phone number?"

Harry looked it up and I dialed.

Thurston sounded as though he had been asleep when the phone rang. I outlined the situation.

"Well," Charlie said, "I made the phone call to the niece at a little after midnight, when I checked in. The call should have been made earlier, but Clarence—he's on from four to midnight—doesn't like to call people and tell them that their loved ones are dead, so he sluffed it off on me."

"What did the niece say when you told her that her uncle was dead?"

He thought for a moment. "She said, 'Oh, no, that's impossible.' "

"Ah, ha," I said. "And what else?"

"I gave her a description of the body and she said that she'd drive down right away. She got here around two-thirty A.M."

"She identified the body as that of her uncle?"

"Right."

I let him go back to sleep and dialed the Mathewson Funeral Home. I identified myself and said, "Do you have a body there which is represented to you as that of one Albert Hennessey?"

"Yes. We picked up the deceased from your morgue. The deceased's niece, Alicia Hennessey, also from Spoon Junction, phoned us the circumstances. When my assistants reported for work at eight this morning, I sent them over to fetch the body."

"This niece requested that you transport her uncle back to Spoon Junction?"

"No. She asked us to cremate him."

I was alarmed. "Have you done so?"

"We don't do things in quite that rush."

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I smiled grimly. "Under no circumstances are you to cremate that body. This has become a police matter. Did this niece give you an address where she can be reached? A hotel, or motel around here?"

"No, she said that she was driving right back home to Spoon Junction and that she would be back later to pick up the ashes."

Ralph and I took the elevator back upstairs.

"Ralph," I said, "when a man finds a wallet on the street and the identification indicates that its owner lives some one hundred miles away, he is not likely to intend to personally return that wallet to its owner. Especially if he does not drive a car."

I led the way to Robbery Division and showed Sergeant Withers, a veteran of 25 years on the force, the snapshots of Helmuth Pringle.

Withers recognized him. "That's Helmuth the Hand."

I let Ralph ask, "Helmuth the Hand?"

"One of the best pickpockets in the city," Withers said. "He's been at it all his life and got caught a few times."

I nodded wisely. "That explains why he has no Social Security number. I don't believe the program covers his field."

Ralph and I went on to Captain Masterson's office where I conveyed all the information we had garnered so far.

Masterson shrugged. "So she made a mistake when she identified the body."

"Perhaps," I said. "However I would like to pursue this entire matter further. I request authorization to drive up to Spoon Junction and have a few words with Alicia Hennessey."

He sighed. "What are you up to now, Henry?"

I smiled grimly. "I smell murder, Captain Masterson. Murder."

There was an appropriate silence while Ralph and the captain studied me. Then Captain Masterson's face became a shade thoughtful. "All right, Henry, take a car and have your little trip."

When we left him, he was still thinking.

Ralph and I checked out a car from the police garage and Ralph took the wheel for Spoon Junction.

"Henry," Ralph said, "why would Helmuth the Hand carry his victim's wallet on his person? Why didn't he just take the money and throw the wallet away?"

"Ralph, this is the age of the checkbook and credit cards. People simply do not carry significant sums of cash in their wallets any more. I rather suspect that today a pickpocket's major source of income comes not from cash, but from the credit cards he finds in his victim's wallet. He uses them freely for a day or two and then

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discards the wallet and its contents." I watched the passing scenery and then chuckled. "Words, words."

Ralph took his eyes from the traffic for a moment. "What words?"

"The words people use, and when, and why. For instance, when informed of her uncle's death, Alicia Hennessey's first words were, 'Oh, no, that's impossible!' "

"So? When people get news they don't want to believe, they say things like 'Oh, no, that's impossible,' or 'I don't believe it!' "

"True enough. However in the light of other things, I believe that when Alicia Hennessey said, 'Oh, no, that's impossible,' she was not reacting to bad news, she was simply stating a fact. Her uncle was quite alive and she knew it. Very probably at the time of the phone call he was sleeping peacefully in his own bed."

"Then why did she say that she'd be right down to identify the body?"

"Because at that moment there flashed into her mind one of the most cold-blooded murder plots we have ever encountered, Ralph. Alicia Hennessey knew that there must have been some mistake. But then she remembered that her uncle *had* been to Milwaukee recently and that his pocket *had* been picked while he was there. And when the morgue attendant went on to describe the corpse, she realized that it matched her uncle's physical description. I suspect that Helmuth the Hand made a practice of concentrating on the wallets of people who rather resembled him in general physique so that he would have no trouble using their credit cards."

Ralph sighed. "And so you think that she murdered her uncle, hid his body, and then came down to identify the corpse in our morgue as that of her uncle?"

"Not in that order, Ralph. I doubt if she would have been quite that rash. No, *first* she wondered *if* she could get away with murder, and it wouldn't hurt to find out. So she sneaked out of the house, drove down to Milwaukee, and 'identified' the body as that of her uncle. And she found that it was a simple matter to have it cremated right there, with no one the wiser. *Then* she drove back to Spoon Junction and murdered her uncle."

Ralph drove silently for a while. "There's one thing that worries me."

"What's that?"

"Sometimes you're right."

"Ralph," I said, "either *she* murdered her uncle when she returned, or her accomplice did."

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Ralph almost glared at me. "Now what makes you conjure up an accomplice?"

"Ralph, when you have a one-hundred-and-seventy-pound body to dispose of, do you suppose that a lone woman is going to have the strength to transport that body from a second-story bedroom to the grounds outside, much less dig the grave?"

For some reason Ralph seemed to be getting warm under the collar. "How do you know that her uncle slept in a second-floor bedroom?"

"Because he is rich, or at least well-to-do. Money is usually the motive for killing uncles. And being rich and living in a small town, he would undoubtedly live in a big house, rather than in one of the scarce apartment buildings, and big houses invariably have their bedrooms on the second floor, excepting those of the servants, of course."

We reached Spoon Junction at approximately one o'clock in the afternoon. A sign at its outskirts indicated its population as 3204. We found the Town Hall and identified ourselves to Spoon Junction's Chief of Police, a man named Gullickson.

Gullickson was middle-aged, florid, and weighed about 250 pounds. "Just what can I do for you?" he asked.

Ralph spoke. "We are investigating the possible mis-identification of a body in Milwaukee by one of your residents. It's strictly routine, but it's a little matter we want to clear up."

Gullickson nodded amiably. "Who did this mis-identifying?"

"A Miss Alicia Hennessey," Ralph said. "She came down to Milwaukee and identified the body of a hit-and-run victim as that of her uncle. Only we know now that it isn't her uncle."

Gullickson pondered. "Now why would she do a thing like that?"

Naturally I smiled. "That is what we are here to find out, Chief. Could you tell us where Alicia Hennessey resides?"

"I'll do better than that. I'll take you there myself."

Ralph and I joined him in his patrol car and he pulled away from the curb. "This Miss Hennessey," I said. "Is she engaged? Perhaps to someone rather strong?"

"Not that I know of. My wife keeps track of everything that goes on in this town and she would have told me. Why?"

"Is Miss Hennessey popular? Does she have a lot of muscular male friends?"

He shrugged. "According to my wife, she's pretty much of a stay-at-home."

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Gullickson turned into a quiet residential street lined with monumental elms. After two blocks he parked at the curb before a large three-story structure set well back from the street on what appeared to be about four acres of well-kept open grounds.

I saw a rather burly young man on his knees working in a flower bed. "Who is that?"

"Clarence Tuttle," Gullickson said. "He's the gardener and grounds keeper. This place is big enough so that it's a full-time job."

I nodded sagaciously. "It all reminds me of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*."

Ralph seemed surprised. "Usually things remind you of *The Purloined Letter*."

"Not this time, Ralph." I sternly studied the man in the flower bed. "A strange pair, they were. The lady and her lover. So different by nature, by station in life. And yet they were magnetically, irresistibly drawn together."

Gullickson regarded Tuttle too. "I saw the movie. I hear they made a book out of it."

I now surveyed the extensive grounds. "It's a funny thing about bodies."

Gullickson scratched an eyebrow. "What bodies?"

I smiled enigmatically, of course. "I was just thinking that whenever one wants to dispose of a murdered body, one almost invariably buries it on one's own property. So to speak, in some cases. Probably because one knows where to bury it so that one will not be observed in the act or arrested for trespassing." I skillfully pulled myself out of the reverie. "Now shall we go up to the house and see Miss Hennessey?"

Gullickson hung back. "You two just go ahead. I'll join you later."

Ralph and I took the long walk to the front door and rang. When I looked back, I saw Gullickson talking to Clarence Tuttle.

A maid answered the door. Ralph and I identified ourselves, indicated whom we wished to see, and she escorted us to a drawing room overlooking the terrace.

Outside, I saw Gullickson and Tuttle apparently strolling the grounds. I frowned. Had I said too much? Was Gullickson trying to work my side of the street?

After ten minutes a young woman in her mid-twenties entered the room. She had rather green eyes and seemed not at all affected by the loss of her uncle. "I'm sorry to keep you waiting, but I was catching up on lost sleep."

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I got directly to the point. "Miss Hennessey, were you, or were you not, in Milwaukee early this morning and did you, or did you not, identify a human body in the Milwaukee City Morgue as being that of one Albert Hennessey, your uncle?"

She blinked. "Did you come all the way up here just because of that?"

"Please answer the question. Yes or no."

"Yes."

I smiled tightly. "Miss Hennessey, we are here to tell you that we know that the body which you so identified is not your uncle at all."

She seemed to study me. "I guess I made a mistake. The truth is that I didn't look at the body."

"The morgue attendant claims you did."

"Well, I was there and all that, but when he pulled out that drawer and started taking the sheet away from the corpse's face, I just couldn't look. I closed my eyes and just said, 'Yes, that's Uncle Albert.' "

"Why?"

"Because they'd already shown me Uncle Albert's wallet and the morgue attendant had described the body to me over the phone, and I thought that the police couldn't possibly be all that wrong, and besides, it's just a formality anyway, isn't it?"

"If you had kept your eyes closed, as you now maintain, the morgue attendant surely would have noticed and mentioned that fact to me."

"He didn't know that I had my eyes closed. I was wearing dark-green sunglasses."

I chuckled. "You were wearing dark-green sunglasses in the morgue in the basement of the City Municipal Building at two-thirty in the morning?"

"Because I'd been doing a lot of crying and my eyes were red and I didn't want anybody to see me like that. So I put on the sunglasses just before I stepped into the building."

Ralph was on her side. "Sounds reasonable to me."

Through the French windows I could see Chief Gullickson and Clarence Tuttle disappear into a blind spot between the garages and a shed.

I turned back to Miss Hennessey. "But why did you make such hasty arrangements to cremate the body in the city? Why didn't you want it shipped back home?"

"Because Uncle Albert told me that he didn't believe in funeral

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services and besides, he wanted to be cremated and have his ashes scattered over Lake Michigan. And Lake Michigan is right there, next to Milwaukee, you know. So I thought that there wasn't any sensible point to having the body shipped all the way back home when everything could be taken care of right there."

Undaunted, I smiled. "Since the corpse was not that of your uncle, then your uncle must still be alive. Could I speak to him? Or has he suddenly gone on a long trip and no one knows when he will return?"

"Oh, no," she said. "He got back from Milwaukee this morning. As a matter of fact, that's him coming down the stairs right now."

I looked through the open drawing-room doors. I saw a man of about 50, weighing approximately 170 pounds, height five foot eight give or take an inch. He appeared to be frowning at an opened crossword-puzzle magazine in one hand.

I was not so easily defeated. "Just how many uncles do you have?"

"Just one." She greeted him as he entered the room. "Uncle, these two policemen came all the way from Milwaukee about that mixup at the morgue."

Uncle Albert, if it was he, nodded. "I was down there on business and had my pocket picked. Somehow this hit-and-run victim got hold of it and the police assumed that he was me and phoned Alicia."

Alicia smiled. "Frankly when Uncle Albert came back here at ten this morning I thought I'd seen a ghost."

Uncle Albert corroborated. "After I got Alicia calmed down and saw to it that she had a drink and went up to bed, I called Milwaukee to straighten out the mess. I talked to a Captain Masterson and he told me that the two of you were on your way up here about the matter. Evidently it was too late for him to recall you."

I had been looking out of those French windows again. Chief Gullickson and Tuttle came back into view. Gullickson snapped a pair of handcuffs on Tuttle's wrists.

I closed my eyes.

"Would any one of you by any chance know a four-letter word for foreign trade discount?" Uncle Albert asked.

"Agio," I said automatically.

He felt that he was on a winning streak. "A four-letter word for brain passage?"

"Iter. It is also a Roman road."

"My," Alicia said, "I just admire a man with a crossword-puzzle vocabulary."

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"Henry is one of the charter founders of the Wisconsin Crossword Puzzleteers," Ralph said. "As a matter of fact, he was elected Sergeant-at-arms."

I shrugged. "Probably because of my background."

Gullickson and Tuttle entered the room through a French window. Tuttle did not seem amused by the attention he was receiving, but the chief beamed. "I know where the body is."

I cleared my throat. "Chief, I'd like to speak to you privately for a moment."

"Whose body?" Alicia Hennessey asked.

"Mabel Tenninger's," Gullickson said.

I reviewed what my ears had heard. "Who the hell is Mabel Tenninger?"

"She was the chief teller over at the bank," Gullickson said. "Last week she disappeared. And so did thirty thousand dollars of the bank's money. We all thought she'd just skipped off for places unknown. She was always talking about traveling."

The chief still bestowed his smile. "When Sergeant Turnbuckle here talked about Lady Chatterley and strange lovers, I suddenly remembered that I'd seen Mabel and Clarence Tuttle walking together a couple of times. I didn't think nothing of it then because Mabel was in her forties and Clarence is about twenty-five. I thought they just happened to be going in the same direction and were just being polite to each other. But then when the sergeant mentioned about people burying murdered bodies, I began thinking.

"I asked Clarence some questions and didn't get too good answers. So we walked around the place until I found a spot between the garages and the shed that looked like a nice private place to dig a grave, if you wanted to. Also I noticed that three of the bushes there looked wilted, like their roots had been disturbed and they hadn't caught on again yet. When I told Clarence that I was going to get a shovel and dig, he decided there wasn't any point in holding back any more. It seems that he and Mabel had a relationship and Mabel thought they were going to leave town with thirty thousand dollars. Only Clarence had other ideas. He just wanted the money."

Clarence Tuttle wore the hang-dog look of a villain caught in the act.

Chief Gullickson put a hand on my shoulder. "I wouldn't have been able to solve this case without Sergeant Turnbuckle's help."

Alicia had evidently remembered more than my surname. "Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle? What does the S stand for?"

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"Serendipity," Ralph said.

It did not.

"How does one get to join the Wisconsin Crossword Puzzleteers?" Alicia asked.

I had been staring out of another window. "There is an application blank in the back pages of your uncle's magazine."

"The Puzzleteers are having their annual convention in Sheboygan next week," Ralph said. "I think you take county trunk CC east from here."

Alicia's voice smiled. "I'll be there."

Ralph and I got back to Milwaukee and our desks at about four-thirty that afternoon.

Captain Masterson looked out of his office, saw us, and came out smiling. "Well, Henry, you did it again."

Why was the room so warm?

He turned to Ralph. "When Henry said that he smelled murder, it got me to thinking about Helmuth the Hand and his demise. I phoned the lab to see what they had and they said they'd come up with bright-green paint scrapings from the car that ran him down. Then I called the Motor Vehicle Bureau and had them do a rundown on Mrs. Watson and her husband. Sure enough, he owns a bright-green sedan. We went over there and found that the scrapings came from his car. It turns out that he was driving home after getting a couple of six-packs when he saw his brother-in-law crossing the street just ahead. So on impulse, he says, he just stepped on the accelerator and ran him down. Helmuth had a hefty life-insurance policy and his sister, Watson's wife, is the beneficiary."

For the second time that day I found a hand on my shoulder. "Without your words, Henry, I don't think we would ever have found out who ran Helmuth down."

The phone on my desk rang. I picked it up. "Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle," I said. "S as in serendipity."

It was a wrong number.

Some days are like that.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

It wasn't only that two merchant seamen vanished—that was mysterious enough. But what they left behind—that was bizarre . . . Once again Captain Leopold, head of the Violent Crimes Squad, is confronted and challenged by an "impossible" situation. The disappearances just couldn't have happened—but they did . . .

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD AND THE VANISHING MEN

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Captain Leopold had known Jennings Blake for more than 20 years—ever since Leopold returned to the city and took the position with what was now the Violent Crimes Squad. Blake had represented Leopold during his divorce proceedings long ago, and their paths had crossed often in the courtroom during the years that followed.

On the sunny June morning when Jennings Blake came to visit Leopold in his little office on the second floor of Police Headquarters, they had not seen each other in more than a year. The lawyer had grown stouter and grayer, though Leopold could hardly mention these symptoms of middle age from which he himself suffered.

Instead he said, "I haven't seen you in court lately, Jennings. Letting the younger fellows handle the tough ones?"

The lawyer smiled, as if remembering and relishing their friendly rivalry of earlier years. "The ones I handle never get to court, Captain."

"You haven't changed a bit." Leopold leaned back, relaxing. Jennings Blake was like an old familiar friend, although they rarely saw each other socially. Even on a warm June day he still wore his

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traditional dark-blue suit, the coat neatly buttoned over white shirt and tie. He'd dressed exactly the same when he handled Leopold's divorce 20 years ago. "What can I do for you today, counselor?"

"There's an odd sort of estate case I'm working on. Two important witnesses have vanished in the past week and that bothers me."

"Have you reported it to Missing Persons?"

Blake shook his head. "They're both from out of town and I haven't reported it till now because I wasn't certain they'd really vanished. The whole thing is so bizarre—"

"Any reason to suspect violence?"

"Why do you ask?"

"You came to Violent Crimes rather than Missing Persons, so it's a natural question."

"I came here because I know you, Captain. But yes, there could be violence."

Leopold pulled a yellow legal pad across the desk and picked up a pencil. "Their names?"

"Sam Wellington and Rick O'Brian. They're merchant seamen. I brought them here to testify in a probate hearing later this week."

"Suppose you start at the beginning," Leopold suggested.

"Very well." The lawyer shifted a bit awkwardly in his chair. "Do you know what a nuncupative will is?"

"No idea," Leopold admitted.

"In this state and many others the law allows members of the armed forces or mariners at sea to make an unwritten or nuncupative will under certain circumstances. The provisions of such an oral will must be clearly established by at least two witnesses before it can be admitted to probate."

Leopold frowned. "You mean circumstances like a soldier going into battle or a seaman on a sinking ship?"

"Actually the law is not quite that strict. As long as the testator served in the armed forces during a declared or undeclared war, and was in a combat zone or on his way to a combat zone, a nuncupative will is valid in this state. And in the case of a merchant seaman he can even be on board a ship tied up at a dock when he makes his oral will. The intent of the law, of course, is to recognize the imminent dangers constantly threatening members of the armed forces in wartime or mariners at sea at any time."

"And your case involves merchant seamen?"

"Correct. William Tree was a member of the merchant marine, the first mate on the cargo ship *Nancy Star*, registered in Panama

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but owned by an American firm. The ship encountered violent weather in the Caribbean last October. When some cargo on deck came loose, William Tree went out with some other men to secure it. Before he went, he told two witnesses—Wellington and O'Brian—that if anything happened to him he wanted everything he owned to go to his fiancée, Nicole Scanlon."

"Your client."

"My client, exactly. William Tree vanished from the deck of the ship, apparently swept overboard by a wave although no one actually saw it happen. In any event, he was gone from the ship and was declared officially dead despite the absence of a body. *Lost at sea* is the quaint old term for it. Now we come to the crucial part. Two days before William Tree was lost at sea, his father died of a heart attack here in the city. Perhaps you've heard of Tree Enterprises."

"The newspaper publisher." The picture was emerging in Leopold's mind. Jennings Blake was in this because there was a great deal of money involved.

"Exactly. William Tree died without knowing of his father's death. The father had never approved of his maritime career, but nevertheless he left his estate in equal shares to his two sons—William and Paul. The estate, including the elder Tree's share in Tree Enterprises, amounts to about two million dollars."

"So if you can probate your oral will, your client receives about one million dollars. If you can't, brother Paul gets everything."

"Exactly. He would inherit William's share as next of kin. Their mother died some years ago and there are no other siblings."

"Now tell me about your two witnesses."

"Nicole was contacted by them last winter, a few months after William Tree's death. When she heard their story of the oral will, she came to me. There was some delay in the court hearing because of the necessity to establish the fact of William's death, but now it's scheduled for Thursday and I've brought in Wellington and O'Brian to testify. Only they've both disappeared."

"How?"

"Wellington was staying at the Holiday Inn. Last Saturday evening I went there to take a preliminary statement from him. At one point I excused myself to use the bathroom. When I came back he was gone. There was a large damp spot on the rug by his chair, as if something had been spilled."

"Was the door bolted on the inside?"

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"No, he hadn't bolted or chained it after I arrived. He could have just walked out, and that's what I supposed did happen. Until the second one."

"Rick O'Brian?" Leopold asked, consulting his notes.

Jennings Blake nodded. "We met last evening at the outdoor café down at the Plaza. I stepped away from the table for a moment to get a pack of cigarettes and when I looked back he was gone. He was wearing a bright red jacket and should have been easy to spot, even in a crowd. But he was nowhere. I asked people at nearby tables, but no one noticed him leave."

"How long was your back turned to the table?"

"Only the length of time it takes to drop some coins in the slot and pull the plunger for the cigarettes. Maybe ten seconds. He *couldn't* have gotten out of my range of vision that quickly. Besides, there was something else."

"What?"

"Water spilled on his chair, as if a drink had overturned."

"Just like Wellington."

"Exactly."

Leopold shrugged. "Coincidence."

"But where did they *go*, Captain? I brought them here, they were willing to testify, and then they simply vanished. With Wellington I figured he ran off to get drunk somewhere, but now that they've both vanished I think it's something more. I think someone's trying to keep them from testifying on Thursday."

"The brother, Paul Tree?"

"I don't know. But something might have happened to them."

"How do you explain the water?"

The lawyer looked uncomfortable. "Someone might want us to connect these happenings with William Tree's death at sea—the wave that washed him away."

"You think Tree's not really dead? Or that he's come back from the dead?" Leopold was grinning now. Somehow he couldn't take it all as seriously as the lawyer did. "Do you have a picture of this fellow Tree?"

"I've only seen the newspaper photos of him. But I honestly don't—"

They were interrupted by Policewoman Connie Trent who appeared at the door. "Could I see you for a moment, Captain?"

"Certainly. Excuse me, Jennings."

Connie's desk was in the squad room, just a few feet from Leopold's door. He joined her there and glanced at the note she held in

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her hand. "The desk sergeant downstairs just found this. He doesn't know who left it."

The typed message was brief and to the point: *Captain Leopold—Stay away from the lawyer Jennings Blake. The Tree affair does not concern the police.*

"Threatening letters to the police?" Leopold snorted. "Now I've seen everything! Ask Fletcher to check it for prints."

He turned and walked back into his office, and that was when he began to take the case seriously.

Jennings Blake had disappeared.

The office was empty.

And there was a large damp spot on the carpet by his chair.

Leopold's first reaction was to hurry into the squad room, looking for the missing man. But there were only the familiar detectives plus a few police officers filling out arrest reports. On a bench near the door a handcuffed burglary suspect sat smoking a cigarette.

"Connie, did you see what became of Jennings Blake?"

"Isn't he in your office?"

"No."

Fletcher's glassed-in cubicle was near the front of the squad room, by the room's only exit, and Leopold asked him next. Fletcher scratched his head and scowled. "The lawyer that came to see you, Captain? He didn't come by here. I been keeping my eye on our prisoner there, and I'd have noticed him if he walked by."

Leopold asked the rest of the detectives and police officers in the squad room. He even asked the burglary suspect. Their answers were all the same. They'd seen nothing of Jennings Blake. He hadn't come out through the squad room. Two more policemen came in with a box of stolen merchandise they'd recovered and the place was suddenly busy. Leopold signaled Fletcher and Connie to join him in his office. "What is it, Captain?" Fletcher asked, glancing around. "Where's Blake?"

"Damned if I know. He just—vanished!"

Connie pointed. "He must have gone out the window."

It was true that both windows in the room were open about six inches at the bottom, providing a bit of breeze that was the office's only air conditioning. "He couldn't fit through that space," Leopold said. "And these damn windows are hard to raise and lower. Do you think he pushed it up, climbed out on the ledge, and sat there struggling to pull it down again?"

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He demonstrated by pushing the window up with effort, and stuck his head out. They were only on the second floor, overlooking the parking lot, but the line of cars parked directly below the windows would have made for a hard landing. None of the hoods showed the dent or scrape that would have resulted from someone dropping onto one of them, nor were there any handy ropes dangling from the building. The building's fire escape was far out of reach, around the corner.

Leopold pulled his head back in. "No, Jennings couldn't have gone out this way."

"Then where is he?" Connie wanted to know.

Leopold walked to the door and stood there. The squad room was busy and noisy again, but there was still no Jennings Blake. If he left Leopold's office during the few seconds Leopold was at Connie's desk, he'd have had to walk past a dozen people without being seen. The other way, to the right of the office door, there was only an alcove with the coffee machine and filing cabinets. Not even a place to hide, and certainly no exit.

"I don't know," Leopold admitted. "I don't know what happened to him. Either he's playing some bizarre practical joke, or—"

"Or what?"

"Or three men have now vanished under unusual circumstances. Look, Connie, get on the phone to Blake's office and home. Don't alarm them but find out if he's turned up at either place. Leave a message for him to call here. Fletcher, take the note from Connie's desk and dust it for prints." He bent to the worn carpeting and tried to moisten his fingers with the spilled liquid. "Seems to be water, all right," he decided after touching a moist finger to his tongue. "There's no taste at all."

"But where did it come from?" Connie asked.

"I don't know. Maybe the same place that Jennings Blake went to."

It was after noon before they established with some certainty that Blake had indeed vanished. His wife was frantic and his secretary befuddled. After Fletcher confirmed there were no fingerprints on the note except the desk sergeant's and Connie's, Leopold drove out to visit Mrs. Blake.

Her first name was Ama and he'd met her once or twice at the large political gatherings which are commonplace around election time. She was a woman of 50 or so, still attractive but beginning to

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show the signs of age. "I can't believe he just disappeared."

"I can't believe it either," Leopold said, "and I was there."

"He's never done anything like this before."

"Never played a little practical joke? Never hidden from you in the house?"

"Never."

"Did he say anything to you about the estate case he's working on? The Tree estate?"

"We never discussed business at home. There are so many other things to talk about."

Leopold was deciding he didn't much care for Ama Blake. He wondered if her husband might have had the same feelings. Still, it would be easy enough for a lawyer to arrange a divorce without having to disappear. "Did he have any trouble with other partners in the firm?"

"I told you he never discussed it. Why are you here asking foolish questions when you should be out finding him?"

Leopold had to agree. "Don't worry, Mrs. Blake," he assured her as he left. "We'll find Jennings." But at that point he wouldn't have wanted to guess whether it would be dead or alive.

Blake's secretary gave him the address of his client, Nicole Scanlon, and Leopold reached her apartment in mid-afternoon. His reception was much friendlier than at the Blake household. Nicole was a dark-haired beauty, still in her twenties, who'd be on any man's mind while he was at sea.

"First of all, Inspector—"

"Captain," Leopold corrected.

"—Captain. I want it understood that when I became engaged to Bill I never had any idea he came from a wealthy family. He was the first mate on a ship and that was all I knew. He mentioned taking me to meet his father some time when he was in port, but we hadn't done it yet."

"It hardly matters when you discovered about the money," Leopold pointed out, feeling quite at home in the overstuffed armchair opposite her. The furniture was expensive and new, and he wondered if Tree had bought it with family money. "The fact remains that you knew it by the time his two shipmates contacted you."

"Well, yes," she admitted reluctantly.

"Wellington and O'Brian. What can you tell me about them?"

"I understand they're missing too."

"Who told you?"

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"Mr. Blake phoned me last night to see if either man had contacted me. It seems they both disappeared while they were with him."

Leopold nodded. "And now Jennings himself has disappeared."

"I can't understand that at all."

"Neither can I, and he vanished from my office." Leopold ran over the sequence of events for her. "I'm wondering if that note could have been left by either of the two missing witnesses. Did Wellington or O'Brian ever suggest you give them a cut of the estate in return for their testimony about the oral will?"

"Certainly not! I've never even met the men, or corresponded with them. They phoned me during the winter when they returned to port, and from there on I turned the entire matter over to Jennings Blake. He felt it was best that I didn't meet them until the probate hearing, to avoid just that sort of suspicion."

"I had to suggest the possibility. There's a great deal of money involved here. When is the last time you spoke to the brother, Paul Tree?"

"Not recently. I never even met him while Bill was alive." He could see the anger building within her. "But if you're looking for some sort of dirty work you certainly should talk to Paul. He's the only one who profits if that oral will is never probated."

"I was thinking the same thing. Has he threatened you in any way?"

"Some months back, after I hired a lawyer and announced my intention of claiming a share of the estate, he came here one evening to see me and offered me ten thousand dollars as an out-of-court settlement. Mr. Blake advised me to turn it down."

"Had Blake interviewed the two witnesses before last weekend?"

"Only by telephone. They were at sea much of the time. He had letters from each of them, but in an estate this size he said it would be necessary to produce the men in court. Oral wills are very much subject to the probate judge's interpretation of the law, and there's debate over whether the law should receive a strict or a liberal construction."

"You sound like a lawyer yourself."

She smiled. "It's all those hours listening to Mr. Blake go over the case."

He left her at the door and went downstairs to his car. So far he'd learned very little about the Tree estate and nothing at all about the vanishing of Jennings Blake.

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When Leopold returned to headquarters, Fletcher was gone from his office and a young patrolman he didn't know was chatting with Connie Trent at her desk. The officer wore his cap far back on his curly black hair, and his arms were handsomely tanned beneath the short-sleeved white shirt of his summer uniform. The name plate beneath his badge said *Rodgers*, and after he'd left, Leopold asked Connie, "Is Rodgers your latest conquest?"

She blushed prettily and busied herself with some reports. "I hardly know him. He's one of the new recruits. I could be his older sister."

"Sure. Or his mother." Before she could explode at that he quickly asked, "Anything on Blake?"

"Nothing. The judge is willing to postpone Thursday's probate hearing if he doesn't turn up. Did you talk to his wife?"

He nodded. "And to his client. I learned nothing from either of them. Did you check the motels where Wellington and O'Brian were registered?"

"Sure did. They were both there and they both disappeared without checking out. The bills went to Blake's office anyway, so that didn't matter. No one seems to think there was anything too unusual."

"So we only have Jennings Blake's word for it," Leopold mused.

"You think he made up the whole story?"

"Well, there's a client and an estate, but after that the whole business seems a bit vague. The idea of someone, ghost or human, entering my office and taking Blake away by force is even more fantastic than if he vanished willingly."

Connie stood up. "Let me get us some coffee and we'll talk about it."

The machine outside his office was working for a change. When she came in he was crouched on the floor behind his desk. "Can you see me?"

She was laughing so hard she almost spilled the coffee. "Of course I can see you! What do you think you're doing?"

"I was wondering if Blake could have been hiding behind my desk when I looked in the first time."

"Not a chance."

"He's slimmer than I am."

"Still no chance, Captain. And if he hid behind the door you'd have seen his silhouette through the frosted glass."

Leopold got up and brushed off his knees. "So he really did leave

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this room, and it had to be either through the door or through the windows."

"Unless you've got a secret panel you never told us about."

He took a sip of coffee. "If he left by the door someone would have seen him. And if he left by the window, how did he manage to pull it down again, and to land on those cars below without injuring himself? And why would he do it in the first place?"

"Maybe you should have bars on your windows, Captain."

"What for? To keep lawyers from jumping out?"

"To keep *you* from trying it! I don't want to come in here and find you out on that ledge trying to shut the window after you."

"Don't worry."

He sent Connie back to her desk and sat there brooding for a time. He stared at the walls and the floor and the ceiling, and finally he got up and went out.

It was time to call on Paul Tree.

The surviving brother had his office on the top floor of the Tree Enterprises building, commanding a view to the south over the Sound that was truly breathtaking. "My office looks out on a parking lot," Leopold said sadly.

Paul Tree remained seated behind his desk. He barely glanced at the windows. He was a man in his early thirties, though he had the mannerisms of someone much older. "I really don't understand the reason for your visit, Captain. You say no crime has been committed?"

"Three men seem to have vanished, including the attorney Jennings Blake, but we have no solid evidence of a crime as yet."

"If this is about my father's estate—"

"It is."

"It's that woman again," he said with some exasperation. "She's after my brother's share and she doesn't care how she gets it."

"You mean Nicole Scanlon?"

"Of course. She hired those two merchant seamen to make up that phony story, but when it gets down to delivering them in a court of law she can't produce."

"If anything's happened to them you'd be a prime suspect," Leopold pointed out.

"All that's happened is that they got smart and went back to sea."

"And Jennings Blake?"

"I don't believe he's missing."

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"I can tell you he is."

Paul Tree glanced at his watch. "Say, it's after five. I'm going home now."

"I thought newspapermen worked all night."

"Not this one. All those long hours got my father was an early grave."

"Tell me about your brother."

"What's there to tell? He ran away to sea and he was lost there."

"It's like something out of the last century."

"Yes, isn't it? Now you really must excuse me, Captain."

"If he spent so much time at sea how'd he manage to meet and become engaged to Nicole Scanlon?"

"You'd have to ask her that. Frankly, I'm not even too sure there was an engagement. Knowing my brother, he probably shacked up with her when he was in town."

"Has there been any hint that William might not have been killed at sea?"

"What?" Paul Tree seemed to lose his composure for the first time. "What do you mean?"

"I told you three men have disappeared. Water or wet spots were found at the site of each disappearance. Someone seems to be hinting that William has come back from the sea for these people."

"My God! Do you believe in ghosts, Captain?"

"Not in this case," Leopold answered, quite seriously. "I touched a bit of the water to my tongue and it had no taste at all. Your brother's ghost would surely have been dripping salt water, not fresh water."

"Well, fine, you've deduced it's not a ghost!"

"But I haven't deduced that it's not William. A ship might have picked him up, and perhaps now he's revenging himself on his two shipmates who left him to die."

"Did they do that?"

"I don't know," Leopold admitted. "They're not available for questioning. I have a case without any corpses at all. I not only don't know who did it—I don't even know what's been done, and to whom!"

"Well, I'm sure William wouldn't be walking around alive without contacting me. The courts are convinced he's dead and so am I."

"Nicole Scanlon says you tried to buy her off. Is that true?"

"I offered her some money. That's all she's after. My price just wasn't high enough."

"All right," Leopold said. "This whole thing may be some sort of

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extortion scheme. If anyone contacts you for money I want you to call me at once."

"I surely will."

Leopold was on his way back downtown when a call came in for him on the radio. A body had been found in the trunk of a stolen car at the airport parking lot. It appeared to be someone connected with the Blake affair.

Driving to the airport with his siren on, Leopold wondered if the body might be that of Jennings Blake himself. But when he arrived, pushing his way through a ring of curious spectators, he found Fletcher standing over the body of a man he'd never seen before.

"We found these in his pocket, Captain, but no wallet or identification."

Leopold looked over the crumpled pack of cigarettes and a lighter that had *Nancy Star* stenciled on the side of it. There was also a tiny address book with a few names in it. The only local one was Jennings Blake, with his office phone number written after the name.

"How'd he die?" Leopold asked.

"Shot once in the back of the head."

"All right. It's probably Sam Wellington or Rick O'Brian, one of Blake's two witnesses, but I'm not taking any chances. Pick up Nicole Scanlon and ask her if she can identify the body."

Fletcher scowled. "If it's not Wellington or O'Brian, who could it be?"

"William Tree, if he came back from the dead."

It was a good idea, the sort that would have made a bit of sense in such a crazy case, but it wasn't to be. Nicole Scanlon quickly doused it by saying the dead man looked nothing like her fiancé. "See? Here's a picture of him, taken on his final voyage."

Leopold inspected the snapshot from her wallet and had to agree. "Then it's either Wellington or O'Brian. Any idea which?" The man in the picture, standing against the railing of a ship at sea, looked enough like Paul Tree to be his brother. A life preserver on the railing carried the name *Nancy Star*.

"No idea," she replied. "I told you I never met either man."

"That's right," Leopold agreed.

"Paul Tree would stop at nothing to keep me from getting that money."

"You think he killed this man?"

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"That's your problem. But if it's either of my two witnesses, the oral will can't be probated."

"Not unless a new witness is found. William Tree might have made his statement before other crewmen as well."

"That's possible." She shivered a little. "Let's get out of here. I only hope you don't have me down tomorrow to identify another body."

"The second witness?"

"Or Jennings Blake."

It was a bad night and the morning was no better.

The newspapers had got wind of Blake's disappearance and there were reporters at Headquarters wanting to see and photograph Leopold's office. He often marveled at the power of the press, and wondered if there might be some way to use them in the present case. Thinking about it, looking at the morgue shot of the murdered man's face on his desk, he was interrupted by a call from Ama Blake.

"Do you mean someone as important as my husband can vanish from your office and never be seen again?" she asked, her voice crackling over the wire.

"I'm sure we'll see Jennings again," Leopold responded. "I'm doing everything I can to find him. Just be calm."

She hung up the phone, not bothering to say goodbye.

Leopold went out to the coffee machine and noticed that the cop named Rodgers was back at Connie's desk. Was he off duty, or maybe waiting to testify in a court case? If he continued to hang around Leopold would have to speak to him. A date with Connie, if that's what he wanted, could be arranged over the telephone after working hours.

Leopold sat staring at his muddy coffee. Suddenly he knew how Jennings Blake had disappeared.

More important, he knew why.

Leopold was sitting in his car behind the building when he saw the blue Ford pull into the parking place in the next row. He could tell by the license number that it was a rented vehicle, and it took him only an instant to recognize the man he'd been waiting for.

"Hello, Jennings," he called out just as the lawyer reached the back door of the building.

Jennings Blake whirled at the sound of his name. "Leopold! I—what in hell are you doing here?"

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"Waiting for you. After all, you did leave quite suddenly yesterday morning."

"I can explain all that."

"I know you can, but everything's changed now. We're talking about murder now—the murder of a merchant seaman named Sam Wellington."

Jennings Blake moistened his lips. "The noon papers said you hadn't identified him."

"It could only have been Wellington if I've got it figured right."

"How's that?"

"I've got two theories," Leopold said. "Let's see which one you buy. The first is this: you made up that whole story about the two witnesses disappearing. They never disappeared the way you said. They were kidnaped by Paul Tree, with your help, and then murdered. You made up the vanishing story and then worked it in my office so I'd believe it. That theory makes you an accessory to murder, counselor."

The color had drained from his face as Leopold spoke. "It was nothing like that! I'm not involved in anything crooked. My God, I never knew anyone was going to be killed!"

"All right. Then let's go upstairs and I'll tell you my second theory."

"I was just—"

"I know where you were going, and I know why. I'll just go along."

Nicole Scanlon opened her apartment door and smiled when she saw Jennings. Her smile froze when she caught sight of Leopold, but he shouldered the door open before she could change her mind about letting them in. "Let's talk about it," Leopold said.

"About what?"

"The man you killed, Nicole."

"I didn't—"

"Let's all sit down and take it from the beginning. This is the way I figure it happened. William Tree was a fellow you knew, Nicole. Maybe you were engaged to him and maybe you weren't. It doesn't really matter, though I'm inclined to believe the latter was the case."

"I'm not going to—"

Leopold held up his hand. "Calm down. I haven't arrested you yet, and before I do I'll give you all the necessary warnings. In any event, William Tree—your friend Bill—was swept overboard during a storm and lost at sea. That much is true. Some months later one

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of his shipmates came to you with a scheme. He'd heard about the legality of oral wills for merchant seamen, and he knew you were Tree's girl friend. He also knew from the newspapers that Tree's wealthy father had died two days ahead of him. So he proposed that he and a shipmate become the necessary two witnesses to Tree's nuncupative will, leaving everything to you. In return for their fraudulent testimony, you would split the estate with them."

She was staring at the floor, avoiding contact with Jennings Blake's eyes, as Leopold hurried on. "You hired Jennings to represent you, and then there was an unexpected turn of events. Jennings, hobbled by a somewhat shrewish wife, fell in love with you."

"Now look here!" the lawyer objected.

"I got the idea from something in my office this morning—a young cop trying to score with a policewoman. I remembered, Nicole, that you were home in mid-afternoon, apparently without a job, and that you had new, expensive furniture here. I could have been wrong, but the signs indicated you might have a wealthy male friend. Jennings fitted the picture, especially when I remembered your telling of all the hours he spent going over the case with you."

Nicole blushed and remained silent. Jennings Blake was on his feet. "This has gone far enough, Leopold!"

"Sit down—I'm only beginning. All was going well last weekend till one of the witnesses, Sam Wellington, got cold feet when it came to actually signing a false document. While you were in the bathroom, Jennings, he got so nervous he spilled his drink and decided to scram. That was our first vanishing man. Naturally you told Nicole and she hurried to her partner in fraud, Rick O'Brian. Since it was all his idea in the first place he was anxious to rescue his plan."

"Why Rick's idea rather than Wellington's?" the lawyer asked, calming down a bit.

"If I believed your story that's the way it had to be. The first disappearance had no real impossibility to it, and was easily explained without the events that followed. O'Brian's disappearance was an attempt to cloud the issue and make you, Jennings, think there was some sinister force at work."

"How did O'Brian vanish from the table at that outdoor restaurant?"

"By the simplest trick in the world. You told me he was wearing a bright red jacket. He stood up, removed his jacket, bundled it under his arm, and walked away. When you turned around from

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the cigarette machine you were looking for a red jacket in the crowd and you didn't see one. Rick O'Brian had vanished, carefully spilling some water first to further connect his disappearance with the first one."

"And what was this supposed to accomplish?" Nicole asked.

"With both men gone so mysteriously you could shift suspicion to William's brother, Paul. It would give you time to find Wellington and persuade him to play along—or else replace him with another so-called witness from among the crew. As it turned out, Wellington couldn't be persuaded. Maybe he even tried a touch of blackmail. In any event, you and O'Brian killed him."

"Can you prove that in court?" Jennings Blake challenged. Again he was on his feet, as if addressing a jury, defending the woman he loved.

"She lied to me about not being able to identify the body, Jennings. She said she'd never met either witness, and only talked to them on the phone. But she had a snapshot of William Tree taken on his final voyage. She didn't get it from you because you told me you'd seen nothing but a newspaper photo of him. She didn't get it from Tree because he never returned from the voyage. So she had to get it from one of the two witnesses, either in person or through the mail. Why lie about it, unless she was doing something dishonest with them? And if she was involved in the fraud it stands to reason she was involved in the murder."

"That's a lie!" Nicole screamed. "I wasn't even there when Rick killed him!"

That was when the bedroom door opened and a man in a bright red jacket stepped out. He was holding a revolver and bringing it up fast.

"Well, the vanishing Mr. O'Brian!" Leopold said, and shot him in the shoulder.

It was Connie Trent who put the question to him first, back in his office at Headquarters. "That's fine, Captain, you've told us how you captured O'Brian and got a confession out of Nicole. But you haven't told us the most important part. How did Jennings Blake vanish from this room?"

"And why?" Fletcher added. "Since he wasn't involved in the fraud or the murder, what was his motive?"

"He had two motives really," Leopold responded, taking the last question first. "One was simply to bring me into a case that didn't

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yet have a violent crime. He told me he figured with me nosing around it would scare them off."

"He knew Nicole was involved?"

"He feared it. He suspected fraud after both witnesses disappeared so mysteriously—which brings us to his second motive for vanishing. He thought he knew how O'Brian had disappeared—by removing his jacket—but he had to test it out. So he came to my office yesterday morning and vanished the same way."

"By removing his jacket?"

Leopold nodded. "He was wearing a dark-blue suit with a white shirt and tie. Take off the jacket and tie, and what do you have? A policeman's summer uniform. He was wearing a badge and gun under his coat, to heighten the illusion, and he even had a policeman's peaked cap under his coat, pressed against his side. That was why I noticed him moving a bit awkwardly in that chair. He also had a little plastic bag of water, to complete the illusion."

"But what happened to his coat and tie?"

"He bundled them up and shoved them out through the partly open window. The whole thing took mere seconds. Then he walked out of the office while I was reading that note at your desk, Connie—a note he'd dropped off on his way in. He figured you'd call me out to read it."

"But what if I hadn't? Or what if we'd spotted the jacket when we looked out the window?"

"He dropped it between the cars and retrieved it on his way out—but you've got to realize it wouldn't have mattered if we caught him or prevented him from working his act. He wasn't committing a crime—only playing a little joke. He wanted to see if it would work. It did, beautifully, because there are often cops walking through the squad room that none of us know." He glanced at Connie as he said this, and she got his message. "We see the uniform, not the face. Without his suitcoat Jennings Blake vanished as easily as Rick O'Brian."

"But why did he stay missing if it was only a joke?"

"Because it confirmed that his witnesses could have vanished voluntarily—and that made him suspect fraud. Any sort of fraud automatically involved Nicole, whom he loved. He decided to stay missing because he didn't want to go home to his wife. Because he still hoped to be with Nicole. That was why I knew he'd go to her apartment today when he read in the paper of Wellington's murder. I had them run a morgue shot on page one of the noon edition, and

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then I just went to her building and waited for him."

"You made him reappear almost as cleverly as he disappeared," Connie commented.

Leopold smiled. "He taught me a good trick. I must try it myself some night when the Chief is camped out there waiting to see me."

"What about Nicole? Do you think she was in on the murder with O'Brian?"

"Connie, I guess we'll have to let a jury answer that one."

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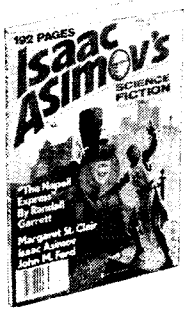

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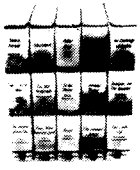

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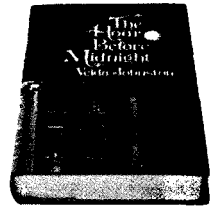

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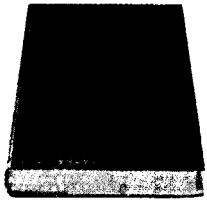

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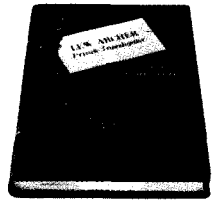

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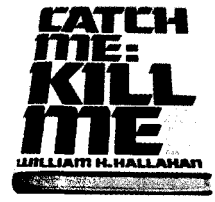

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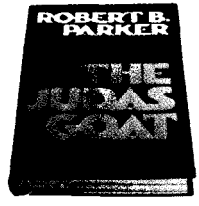

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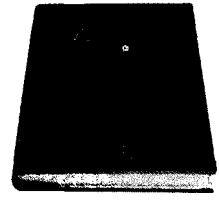

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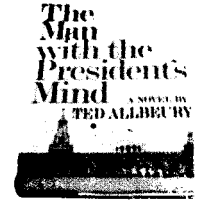

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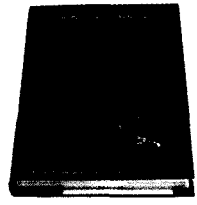

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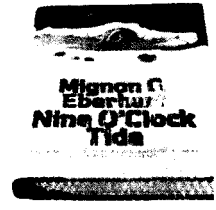

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